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LIFE OF MISS AUSTIN

SAMUEL MERWIN

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THE CHARMED LIFE OF MISS AUSTIN

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"I should like to feel that you have something of mine."

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THE CHARMED LIFE OF MISS AUSTIN

BY

SAMUEL MERWIN

AUTHOR OF "ANTHONY THE ABSOLUTE," "THE CITADEL," ETC

FORTY ILLUSTRATIONS BY

R. M. CROSBY

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1914

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THE CHARMED LIFE OF MISS AUSTIN

I

DINNER AT EIGHT

"WE can't leave the girl alone — in Shanghai," protested the thin woman.

"But she 'll be right here in a hotel full of white folks," insisted the stout man. As he spoke his eyes wandered despairingly to the heap of luggage on which a Chinese porter was pasting Astor House labels. "Bob 's certain to get here before long."

All three — the fat man, the stout woman, and the thin woman — stood for a moment in the silence of perplexity. Outside, the early October twilight was settling over the straggling polyglot city that likes to term itself "the Paris of the East." Within, in the roomy "lounge" that adjoined the hotel-office, there were lights, and tourists sipping tea, and the chatter of many tongues. Close at hand, seated alone by a wicker table, idly fingering a cold teacup, was a girl — an extremely pretty girl, obviously American, with a jaunty traveling-turban set down on her fluffy brown

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hair, with a firmly pointed chin, a straight and rather long nose, clear skin that had been slightly tanned by the winds of the Pacific, and wide, demure hazel eyes that appeared to be gazing out at the clamorous line of rickshaw coolies in the shadowy street. By not so much as the twitch of a muscle did her fresh young face betray that she was listening intently to the conversation of the trio.

"But, Rufus dear"— it was the stout woman — "you don't seem to understand. It is nearly six now. Unless Lieutenant Carver comes soon it will be too late to get Edith back to the ship for dinner. Her aunt and uncle will be worried to death." She paused for emphasis. "We assumed *some* responsibility when we brought her ashore to-day. And you don't leave nice young girls like her unprotected on the China Coast. You know well enough the dreadful code of this part of the world."

The thin woman shuddered. "Between now and eight *anything* might happen!"

The fat man sighed. "Look here," he said, "this is an emergency. And I can't see but what she 's got to do her part in it. I must straighten out the tangle with the Hankow Line people, or we simply can't leave to-night. You two must collect the things you 've bought before the shops close or lose 'em. I certainly can't let either of you knock around Shanghai alone after dark; and if you take her with you she 'll miss Bob when he comes. No, it will be best for her to sit quietly here. Don't tell me that an American girl

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who 's twenty if she 's a minute can't take care of herself in a pinch!"

"You might explain it to the clerk, Rufus . . ."

The fat man glanced at the desk and pursed his lips. Probably the one person on earth least able to comprehend the Occidental motive in such an explanation would be a Malay hotel-clerk in Shanghai.

"No," he said decisively, "nothing like that! She can read a magazine or something. And if Bob should fall down altogether she could dine with us at eight — or whenever we get back — and I 'll take her back to the ship myself. There 's a launch out at nine-thirty, and our Hankow boat does n't leave until midnight."

Miss Edith Austin, when the matter was put before her, assured them that it did n't matter in the least. She even produced a smile — a smile that faded before they were out of the room. Then she went to the window and with wistful eyes watched them ride off into the mystery-laden dusk of Shanghai.

A few moments later she became aware that a certain foreigner, who had for an hour been hovering near, had come quietly to her side — a young man, who wore good clothes over a compact, athletic figure; a man with bold attractive eyes, light waxed moustaches, and on his alert young face the first indescribable marks of dissipation. She had thought him German, but his accent and his odd use of idiom, when he spoke, were more suggestive of Parisian backgrounds. She wondered, with a slight quickening of

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the pulse, whether he were one of the cosmopolitan adventurers about whom center so many travelers' tales of the Coast.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle," he said, in a soft voice, "but perhaps, if you are waiting, you would read my magazine."

"Thank you — no," she replied, facing him. It was amusing to see him hesitate, even flush a little, under her direct gaze. "He is n't used to American girls," she thought. She knew nothing of the horrible connotation that has grown, at Shanghai, about that phrase, "American girl."

"Perhaps it is that I intrude," he managed to say.

"Yes," she replied calmly, "you do."

Well, *that* little episode was over. She was almost sorry. The remark of the thin Miss Oldham came suddenly into her thoughts: "Between now and eight *anything* might happen!" If only something would happen!

Again she looked out into the gathering night. The rickshaw coolies were lighting their gaudy paper lanterns. She was glad to know that the Chinese really use paper lanterns — in a world of continuous disillusionment this bit of romantic color, at least, was really so.

Somewhere off beyond the low buildings of the other side of the street, somewhere beyond the sluggish stream that bounds the American Quarter, lay, she knew, a city that for color and drama and the sheer quality of adventure surpasses the Bagdad of

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"Perhaps it is that I intrude," he managed to say.

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ancient fable — a city where the white race meets the yellow race and struggles with it for gold; where the tourist or the business man rubs elbows with soldiers of fortune, with broken noblemen from Europe, with stranded soldiers and sailors, Mandarins, diplomats, opium-smuggling Parsees, overdressed women of uncertain livelihood. Fellow tourists talked largely of Shanghai. The navy-men had a hundred tales of it. But it appeared to be a city of which girls were shown only a few uninteresting rows of shops, and that by daylight.

For the thousandth time in her unruffled young life she fell to resenting her sex. "They pass me around" — she mused —"wrap me up and lay me aside,— as if I were a *cloisonné* vase or a — a jade teapot."

A Chinese boy glided down the room and handed her a chit that had been hastily addressed in pencil. She tore it open and read —

Dear Edith:

Mighty sorry to fail you, but three hundred French sailors are raising Cain in the French city. I was with de St. André when the word reached him, and volunteered to pitch in and help him round up his men. At the moment it looks rather messy. I guess you 'll have to forgive me and sit down to dinner with the Oldhams. I 'll surely be there in time to get you safely back to the ship. I 'm sending another chit to your aunt and uncle by the first launch so they won't be dragging the Whangpo for you or, worse, hauling the Consul General away from his dinner. Bob.

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She turned the paper over two or three times, very slowly; then reread it. Bob was like the others; she must stay put until he could deliver her "safely" to those other guardians on the ship.

Suddenly her chin came up — a touch of color glowed through the transparent brown of her cheeks — her eyes stared at the swinging red-and-yellow lanterns on the rickshaws. The Oldhams would not be returning for an hour or so; Bob would be even later; there was no one. . . . She held her breath. In her eyes was the fire that passes only when youth passes.

Resuming her habitual girlish composure she calmly buttoned her gloves, took her wrist-bag from the table — on which (she noted with some amusement) the adventurer-person had left his now useless magazine — walked through the office to the street, stepped into the first rickshaw that offered, tucked the robe about herself, and waved a vague hand. "The Bund," she said.

And as it did not occur to her to look around, she failed to observe that an athletic-appearing young foreigner with waxed moustaches and bold, admiring eyes followed in another rickshaw not twenty yards behind.

The mile-long Bund was gay with the lights and the traffic of early evening. On her right were the imposing brick and stone buildings that hide the huddled city from the eyes of the incoming tourist. Banks, insurance companies, newspaper and steamship offices,

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clubs — they were solidly designed to convey to an ancient and slumbrous civilization a sense of the brisk but solid West. All about her, passing along the broad, well-paved street were motor-cars, pony-victorias, passenger-wheelbarrows and rickshaws. On her left were the trees and the grass plots of the narrow park that borders the water front; and beyond these the dim outlines of ocean tramps and junks and opium hulks, the movement of sampans and launches in and out among the shipping, and the broken, dancing reflections of a myriad of colored lights in the water.

She settled back comfortably, with an outward complacency that belied the turbulence within. Her pulse was beating high. "Just to the end of the Bund and back," ran her thoughts, "just to the end of the Bund." She looked down at the ragged shoulders and the bare muscular arms and legs of her coolie; he was running with an easy, springing stride. She drew a long breath, and her hands closed tightly on the bag that lay in her lap.

On and on they went. At a bumpy little stone bridge the coolies pulled up and looked around inquiringly. She waved him on. "Just a little farther," she thought. The park ended here, and between the pavement and the river stood a row of warehouses. Beyond them she caught glimpses of a big river steamer with lights shining from a hundred windows. The coolie turned again; again she waved forward. They were past the stone buildings now, past the warehouses. They had left behind them the absurdly

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European Bund; they were in another land. She looked about with a little gasp of sheer delight. On the right were low frame buildings, all lighted and nearly all hung with signs in French and Chinese. Crowds of Chinese were moving to and fro on the sidewalks, many with hands slipped into capacious sleeves, for the evening air was brisk. At the curb were venders of queer things to eat, calling their wares in a sing-song droning. Along the water-front, dimly lighted by lanterns, were hundreds upon hundreds of matting-roofed sampans, packed in so closely that one could have walked far out on the river merely by stepping from boat to boat. There were no motor-cars here, and only a few rickshaws and carriages. The air was filled with the chatter and laughter of the most talkative race in the world. And it all smelled — a strange blend of odors that is the smell of the East.

This, surely, was China. This was the mysterious land of a thousand enchantments. She felt rather than saw that groups of the yellow men were staring at her, and her nerve-tips tingled with the sheer excitement of it. Of course, now that the experience was becoming really interesting, it was time to turn back; and she suppressed a sigh as she called to the coolie.

A little way behind her, above the casual hubbub of the street, sounded a new noise — a shouting, a scream or two, loud laughter and snatches of song. She called again to the coolie, and turned in sudden alarm.

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A crowd of sailors had poured out from one of the low buildings and taken possession of the street. A brief glance was enough to assure even an extremely inexperienced young American girl that they were very drunk and in a distinctly riotous mood. At the moment they were amusing themselves by upsetting the carts and stands of the food-venders and pelting one another and the bystanders with fruit and cakes. One was singing in a frenzied manner and beating time with a bottle. Three others had advanced close to her rickshaw and for some reason of their own were savagely thrashing a yellow man.

Edith felt herself becoming cold and faint. Looking hurriedly about she saw that another rickshaw was drawing near through the crowd. Its occupant was a man who lifted his hat and bowed ceremoniously. She peered eagerly at him through the uncertain light, then her heart sank; it was the young foreigner who had offered her the magazine. He was smiling now in a way that was perhaps meant to be reassuring but that in fact was subtly alarming, and was bobbing his head toward the brawling sailors as if in emphasis of her need of him.

Somehow she must get back to the Bund. Her frightened eyes sought an opening through the surging crowd that nearly filled the street. There was a clear space close to the farther curb. She urged her coolie toward it. He hesitated.

The young foreigner stepped down from his rickshaw and made his way to her side. " Pardon, Miss,"

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he said, "but not that way. If you will permit, I will show you how to get around by another street."

She shook her head.

"But it is not safe, Mademoiselle. You must let me stay with you. These men are mad with bad whisky. If you have escort, it is something. But a beautiful woman she must not be alone here at night. They will not understand it, these men."

With white face and compressed lips she again shook her head, and waved him aside. "Go there!" she called again to the coolie.

The bare-legged Oriental wavered, glanced about, then wheeled and made an effort to obey her. But the opening she had indicated was suddenly closed by a tall sailor with a flushed face and a drunken light in his eye. His white cotton cap was pushed far back on his head, disclosing a scar that ran from his right temple nearly up to the middle of his forehead. He laughed insolently at her; then turned to shout at his companions,— and she saw that his ear was a filled-out solid thing like a small pin-cushion on the side of his head. His nose was crooked and flattened. His lips were thick and shapeless above a heavy chin.

He was shouting in a foreign tongue — French, she thought, though it was rougher and more guttural than any French she had heard. He sang in a booming voice snatches of a gay little song; and the others laughed boisterously and looked at her.

The coolie had stopped again, and she was calling to him to go on. Suddenly the big sailor with the

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scar and the pin-cushion ears came swiftly forward, gripped him by the shoulders, and swinging his feet clear of the ground threw him sprawling into a group of Chinese who were timidly gathering the contents of a demolished cake-booth. Then the big sailor stepped in between the shafts of the rickshaw and made a speech in his booming voice, bowing extravagantly before her and gesturing with a primitive sort of grace. The others closed in about them, cheering and waving their caps and the bits of loot they had picked up. One grimacing little man brandished a *cloisonné* opium pipe so close that she had to draw her head back.

The big sailor wound up his speech in what was evidently a wild peroration. It sent the jostling, drunken group into an ecstasy. They doubled over with laughter; they embraced one another; they shouted with delight. Then the leader bent forward, threw aside the rickshaw robe, seized one small foot, held it up in his twisted, knotted fingers, and kissed the toe of her shoe.

She tried to draw it away. He raised his head, fixed his bloodshot eyes on hers with a gaze that was horribly hypnotic, and, grinning, let her struggle. She could not so much as move his hand. He bowed, with mock courtesy, and slowly relaxed his grip. Shuddering, she wrapped the robe about herself and sank back in her seat, limp, white of face, her tortured eyes looking about, this way and that, over the white caps of the sailors. She wanted to scream, but

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could not have uttered a sound. Some Chinamen on the sidewalk were laughing. Was it true, then, that a girl must not appear alone in Shanghai . . . the dreadful code of this part of the world . . . *anything* might happen . . .

A young man with athletic shoulders and waxed moustaches was elbowing through the crowd. He reached a wheel of the rickshaw, gripped it with one hand, and with an astonishingly quick and powerful thrust and swing of the other arm swept the crowding sailors back. Then he came leaping over the step of the vehicle in a rush so sudden and so determined that the big sailor simply gave way before it. There was the sound of quick, clean blows driven straight to their mark; and the sailor fell backward over the shafts. The Parisian was after him and on him like a bulldog.

"Quick, Miss," he was shouting, without for an instant turning his head. "Your coolie — try to get away!"

She looked helplessly about. The coolie had disappeared. All around the rickshaw the sailors were pressing, struggling to get at the fighters. Certainly it was better to stay where she was than to step down into that little riot. Here was a situation, indeed, with which she could not pretend to cope. It had passed far beyond her experience and capacity, and was now developing much more rapidly than she could think. She felt a perverse impulse to laugh. Surely it was not so, this extraordinary bit of melodrama. Such

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things do not happen. She passed her hand slowly across her eyes.

In some way the fight was stopped, and there was an argument in which everybody appeared to be talking at the top of his lungs. The Parisian was gesturing vehemently; the sailors were jeering at him and waving their loot in his face. All was confusion. It made her head ache.

The Parisian appeared close at her side, talking rapidly in English. She caught a phrase here and there, looking the while at a bruise under his eye from which a little blood was trickling slowly down upon his cheek.

". . . If you had been with me . . . they know you were alone . . . the big man says it is that you will dine with him . . . spend all his pay . . . I cannot make them understand — it is no use while they are drunk . . . it is as I have said to you — no good woman is alone at night here in Frenchtown — they think it is I who seek you for myself . . . it is that we fight, the large sailor and I. If I win it will be permitted that I take you — that you dine with me . . ."

Then his face expanded in an almost boyish smile. "It is not, I think, so serious," he added gently. "But it is that I simply cannot take you away now. They will not understand. They will not permit. It will not be so bad. You will see that they, though so drunk, are what you of America call the good sport."

The sailors who had been arguing and gesticulating,

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now set up a wild shout, apparently of agreement. Edith placed her hands over her ears for a moment.

"But," she tried to say, when it was quieter, "I can't — you must n't —"

The Parisian smiled again.

"It will not be so much," he said. "We can do nothing. We will humor them."

With that same queer sense of unreality, she sat passively while a dozen hands seized the rickshaw and ran with it a little way along the street. Her Parisian handed her out; she could feel him close at her side, gripping her arm and fending off the crowding sailors as they crossed the sidewalk and entered one of the low buildings. She was hurried down a long passage and into a large, low-ceiled room, a dimly lighted room that was hazy with smoke and close with an odd choking odor.

"Wait"— she found herself saying, with a sense of grotesque inadequacy to the occasion —"I can't breathe! Won't they open a window?"

Along the walls of the room and grouped about the pillars in the center were couches. On many of these lay men, Chinese and white, sunk in slumber, or propped on an elbow puttering over little lamps with steel instruments like knitting-needles. She saw one man raise what she knew to be an opium pipe and with the knitting-needle work up a soft brown pellet on the flat surface of his pipe-bowl.

The sailors were routing the smokers from the central couches and clearing the floor. From some-

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where appeared ropes that were run rapidly around the four central pillars and made fast, forming a roped-in square. Into this arena was tossed a cluster of thin brown boxing-gloves.

The Parisian was speaking into her ear —

"It is a famous place for the fights of sailors, Miss. Each ship, you will know, has its champions. It will not, perhaps, be easy for me, but I will win. Indeed I must. This man is a heavyweight; and he is a fighter of experience — he has the bearing, and the — what do you say? — the cauliflower ear. I am but a middleweight. I must give him twenty, thirty, pounds; but he is drunk; that is it, he is drunk. I am not in condition. It is so, here at Shanghai. One is not careful. But" — his quick, eager talk was beginning to reach her consciousness and find a response there — "but, Miss, though but an amateur I am, I may say, truly expert at the box. I think —" his eye roved across the ring and slowly measured his adversary, and a touch of vanity came into his voice and manner — "I think it will not be difficult. He *is* so drunk. And I — I have, as one says, stayed six rounds with the great Carpentier — at Paris."

She looked, with a curiosity that was struggling out through her dazed mind, about the ring. Within the ropes all was clear. But pressing against them stood a crowd of jostling, shouting, laughing white and yellow men. They were betting, evidently, and were arguing hotly over the odds. As she looked about, a man here and there caught her eye and sud-

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denly became quiet. Others gazed at her with frank interest. A surprising fact was the unmistakable and growing sense of order displayed by the more sober of the sailors and the five or six Americans and Englishmen who appeared to be tacitly in charge of the arrangements. They were all men so rough as to be wholly out of the world as she knew it — opium-smokers apparently, drunkards certainly; yet all seemed to take pride in arranging the fight according to certain set rules of procedure. Lacquered stools were brought and placed in two opposite corners. Pails of water appeared, and bottles, and towels.

She glanced over toward the big sailor, then dropped her eyes and for a moment held her breath; for his seconds were in the act of removing the last article of clothing from the upper half of his body. Then, despite fluttering lids, she looked again.

At that moment the sailor ducked through the ropes and seated himself on the stool, and she knew that his body was beautiful. Beneath the battered face and head, beneath those painfully fascinating "cauliflower" ears, was a pair of broad shoulders with great ropes of muscle curving down over them. The breasts were hard and prominent, standing out like a cornice over the solid muscle-ridged trunk beneath. Even as he sat quietly on his stool, his outspread arms resting easily on the ropes, there was a constant play of delicately responsive knots of muscle beneath the surface of his smooth skin. The entire body cavity seemed to expand and contract rhythmically with his

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heavy breathing. His trousers were drawn in tight about the waist and secured with a bit of light rope. He had kicked off his shoes, and his stockinged feet were feeling the floor as if searching for the powdered resin that was not there.

"Pardon, Miss, but it is to be a fight. I must do the same."

She turned. The Parisian had thrown aside coat and waistcoat, and was jerking at his necktie. His negligé shirt followed. Then he worked his singlet up about his head and struggled with it for a moment. She caught hold of it with both hands and pulled it over his head.

"Thank you," said he simply.

He unlaced his shoes and handed them to an unkempt young cockney — a beachcomber, doubtless — who at once, with sudden and immense self-importance assumed a guardianship over the little heap of discarded clothing.

"You might 'old 'is watch, Miss," said this person. And Edith took the watch and fob and placed them, for safety, in her wrist-bag.

Another unprepossessing young man now spoke to the Parisian. He was many days from the barber, and his hands appeared to be none too steady, but there was assurance in his eye.

"I 'll look after you, mister," he said. "You 'll be all right with me. Worked three years at Brown's Gym. in New York — Twenty-third Street, you know,

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just off Sixth Avenue. And they use me around here some."

With a thrill of sheer excitement Edith stole a glance at her champion — and then another. He was distinctly smaller than the big sailor who was sitting so calmly and confidently in the opposite corner. From neck to waist his skin was fairly pink and white. He was not, like the sailor, ribbed and ridged with muscle; but there was wiry strength in his arms and solidity in the smooth shoulders and the firm back.

"I will be cautious," he was saying, in an eager low voice, to the New Yorker. "I must, as you say, feel him out. It will be, I think, the strength against the cleverness."

The second, like the guardian of the clothing, showed signs of self-importance. He looked his principal over critically, worked his arms, kneaded his shoulders and chest, and struck him lightly here and there about the body. "I guess you 're quick enough," he said.

"It is that with me," replied the Parisian; "it is quickness." And again he proudly uttered the sentence that seemed, as he spoke it, to have an almost mystical import. "Though but an amateur, I have, you see, stayed six rounds with the great Carpentier at Paris."

Edith was impressed by the expression of frank admiration that suddenly illuminated the unshaven

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face of the man who had worked three years at Brown's.

"You don't say!" was the reply. "Then you're sure some fighter."

The seconds met in the center of the ring and gravely discussed the problem of a referee. From among those who volunteered or who were put forward by friends among the spectators a big Englishman was selected as being, on the whole, the least drunk and the most impressive in appearance. He in his turn called the two principals to him, and again Edith was struck by the astonishing sense of order that ruled this wild proceeding. Evidently in the minds of these rough men there was a common acceptance of the traditional rules of the sport. Most surprising of all, the big French sailor quietly accepted his opponent's courteous translation of the referee's instructions. "Women," reflected Edith, "would n't do it like that." She began to feel almost safe. A moment more and she forgot herself in the sheer desperate thrill of the fight.

The referee stood, coat off, watch in hand, one arm raised. The two fighters were seated in their corners. Edith stood by the post, directly behind her champion, quite unconscious of the fact that the crowd had respectfully withdrawn a little way from her on either side.

"Keep him off," the man from Brown's was saying, in staccato whispers—"make him lead. Don't

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let him get in on you. He 'll clinch if he can. Don't let him lay that beef on you."

"Ready, gentlemen!" called the referee. The confusion of voices died out. The referee dropped his arm, stiffly. "Time!" he shouted.

The two half-naked men leaped forward; sparred a moment; then crouched and circled, their feet padding softly on the wooden floor, their brown gloves moving swiftly in feints and in sudden shiftings of defence. Their faces were keen and hard, and they watched each other with the alertness of tigers. Round and round they circled. The sailor's face slowly expanded in a crafty, drunken smile, and he looked down on his slighter opponent with an expression of humorous contempt. One of the spectators shouted something in French. The sailor's intent gaze relaxed for the fraction of a second, and he turned his head. Instantly the Parisian flew at him, just as he had before flown at him over the step of the rickshaw, and his left glove landed on the sailor's face in three quick blows, like the tap — tap — tap of a hammer. The heavyweight spat out an angry exclamation and launched a right swing. But his great arm thrashed the air; the middleweight, on the instant, bent nearly double — so nearly double that his forehead all but brushed the floor — then caught the sailor about the waist and gripped him, clinging close. The alert referee stepped between them and forced them apart.

Each was breathing hard as they fell again to cir-

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cling. A thin trickle of blood appeared below the sailor's nostrils; and the spectators broke into a sudden roar of delight.

"Some class there!" the man from Brown's was muttering at Edith's elbow. "He's got something, that boy. Clever. Ducks like Leaches Cross." Then he raised his voice and called—"Watch his right, Frenchy! The guy 's got a wallop."

The Parisian nodded, but kept his eyes fixed on the sailor as he circled lightly and stealthily about him.

There was a confusion of shouts and catcalls from the crowd about the ropes. The sailor shook his head as if to throw off some blinding harness.

"It 's the liquor that 's bothering him," muttered the New Yorker. "But say, he 's got an awful right."

The sailor tossed his head again, then rushed. The middleweight sidestepped, and hooked in a glancing blow that, accelerating the momentum of the big man, sent him slipping and sprawling to the floor. The building rocked with the shout that went up; but the sailor bounded to his feet and rushed again. Edith, swept clean out of herself, face flushed, eyes shining, hands gripping the rope, followed every motion with fascinated eyes. This second rush carried the fighters directly into their corner, and Edith and the New Yorker had to step back.

The middleweight could not sidestep this time; the big man bore him back until he crashed into the post. Edith felt the nearness of the two sweaty, glistening bodies; their hoarse, quick breathing was loud in her

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ears; the reeking air choked her nostrils; she was faint; but still her fascinated eyes followed every motion. The middleweight's back, as he fought desperately on the defensive, was almost under her eyes. By reaching out a hand she could have touched him. She could see the flash and play of the wiry muscles under his shining pink skin; she could see his elbows and forearms working like pistons as he played on the ribs and stomach of the great body before him; she could see the look of sudden anguish on the shapeless face of the sailor that seemed to be staring at her over the pink shoulder and could hear the involuntary grunts and gasps of the two men as they worked in closer and closer. Then suddenly they were too close. The sailor's arms slid over the shoulders of the Parisian, and all his weight was thrown on the slighter frame in the clinch that followed. The referee pulled them apart.

"Say," observed the man from Brown's, half to Edith, half to himself —"that's infighting now — a bit of the real stuff. We don't see much of that out here."

The fighters were crouching and sparring cautiously when the referee stepped between them and called time. The middleweight dropped his hands and walked quietly to his corner. The heavyweight staggered uncertainly to his. And all about the ringside there was shouting, and disjointed talk, and the brandishing of gold coins.

The middleweight dropped on the stool, leaned back

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on the ropes and closed his eyes. The New Yorker went swiftly and deftly to work on him, fanning him with the towel, sponging his head and face, kneading the muscles of neck, shoulders, arms, and thighs.

"Quick, Miss," he said, looking up from his work, "give him that water bottle. And just keep the towel going, will you?"

Edith obeyed. Leaning over the ropes she waved the towel, with arms that had been trained on the tennis-courts and the golf-course of her home city.

"Harder, please," cried the second.

She worked with added energy. The fighter looked up in protest, but seeing the intent expression on her face, smiled gently.

The New Yorker was talking jerkily. "He 's soft, Bo, but watch that swing. If he lands it, *good-night!* Better use your feet this round — keep away — he may work off his souse and come to life. And save your hands — you 'll need 'em."

The referee called the round. Again the slender man faced the giant. Again they circled, feinted, rushed, dodged, fought.

The third round passed; and the fourth. It was not to be so easy. The sailor, his fuddled spirit settling into a dull anger against this alert little man who jabbed him and evaded him with such persistency, landed a number of heavy blows. The movements of both became slower. Their faces were less alert, more dogged. And now, between rounds, Edith worked with a sureness only a little behind that of the New

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Yorker. Her hat was on a nail, her gloves in a ball on the floor. She sponged the battered face and swung the dingy towel, while the man from Brown's tried to stir the sluggish circulation. It was sober, primitive work. It began to look like desperate work. She forgot the excited spectators, she forgot the bizarre nature of the situation; she was conscious only of her responsibility — the woman's responsibility to succor the man who battles for her — and of the need to learn from the unshaven, rough-spoken but exceedingly efficient young man — who, stripped to undershirt and trousers, was working close beside her — precisely how to be of the greatest service.

The fifth round went badly for the Parisian. When it was over, and he had sunk weakly on the lacquered stool, Edith felt rather than saw the New Yorker shake his head and look grave.

"Work hard," he said between his teeth as he roughly massaged the relaxed muscles. "Slap his face. Use lots of water."

She followed instructions. Then, with an impulse and a sudden flash of memory, she got her wrist-bag, rummaged in it, drew out a bottle of smelling salts, and pressed it against the fighter's nostrils. He breathed it in, then jerked his head away and opened his eyes. But she caught his head, and again pressed the bottle to his nostrils.

"Good business!" It was the New Yorker, looking up from his work with just such an expression of admiration as the Parisian had wrung from him before

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the fight. "That 's the very thing. You 're all right, Miss. You sure are — all — right!"

And Edith watched her man step out for the sixth round, a shade more alert for that sharp tang in his

She drew out a bottle of smelling salts, and pressed it against the fighter's nostrils.

nostrils, with a curious little glow in her heart. For all in a moment she knew that it meant something to win that honest commendation. Many men had flattered her; but never before in her sheltered young life

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had a man spoken to her quite like that . . . directly, as an equal.

"God help him," the New Yorker was muttering. "It 's up to Him now — Him and Frenchy. They 're both in. One way or the other, a chance blow 'll do it."

The sailor was clumsy and uncertain in his movements. His eyes were dull. He rushed at the middleweight and bore him down on the ropes, but drew a shower of body blows for his trouble. In some pain and bewilderment he fell back; and then, when the little man rushed, swung his right with all the weight of his great frame thrown in behind it. There was a thud as it landed, a tenth of a second of silence, then a roar from the spectators so wild, so utterly, unmistakably savage, that Edith turned faint and closed her eyes. When after an instant they opened again, it was only with a conscious effort of will that she could control her faculties sufficiently to comprehend what was taking place.

The middleweight had staggered back against the ropes and was supporting himself by holding on with one hand. The other hand hung limp at his side. His body swayed. His legs bent and wobbled as if about to give way under him. His chin sagged, his mouth hung partly open, his eyes wandered. He presented a picture of utter collapse.

Facing him, and only a little way off, the heavyweight was floundering about, too weak and confused to see and grasp his opportunity. The building

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rocked with the screams of the spectators urging him on to the knockout.

The man from Brown's for a moment stared intently at his principal; picked up the towel and rolled it into a ball, as if to toss it into the ring; then hesitated, and again studied the situation.

"I'd swear that blow never landed," he was saying aloud. "Looked to me like he caught it on the arm. Is the boy stalling?"

Slowly the big sailor grasped the import of the frantic urgings of his seconds and the confused yelling of the crowd. He gathered himself, shook the sweat out of his eyes, and plunged heavily forward — all open, his arms swinging wildly about his head.

Instantly the middleweight stiffened up, thrust one foot out, threw his left forearm across his chin, and brought up his right in a lightning uppercut that landed squarely on the point of the sailor's jaw. It was a perfect manœuver and a perfect blow. The sailor spun around, slipped quietly to the floor, rolled over on his back, stiffened out, and lay unconscious while the referee slowly swung his arm up and down ten times.

The referee pocketed his watch, slapped the middleweight on the shoulder, and turning toward the sailor's corner, cried: "Get your man. He's out!"

The middleweight, with a faint smile hovering on his bruised face, walked wearily to his corner, sank on the stool, and fell back into the arms of his second. And Edith, leaning weakly against the pillar during

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the brief moment before she roused herself to hunt about for her hat and her gloves, looked down at the two strange faces with a puzzled expression. She had intruded into the world of these rough men. She had been under fire with them. And in the intensity of the moment they had accepted her, not as a beautiful girl but as a human being. The experience was too close and too startling to be comprehended all at once; but even at the moment she knew that new, queer, hitherto suppressed notions and speculations were at large in her mind. Until within the hour she would have looked down upon and a little feared these men. But now she respected them, almost — she held her breath — admired them. She wondered if it would ever again be possible for her to accept the *cloisonné*-vase, the jade-teapot theory of womanhood.

But the situation was too much for her. Her head reeled with the confusion and the excitement of it. Life, that had always been, after all, rather a simple affair, had suddenly become outrageously complex. She turned away and steadied herself against the pillar. Through the continuous chattering and shouting of the crowd came to her ears the sound of handclapping; and she vaguely knew that they were applauding her, but did not raise her eyes. After a moment she put on her hat and looked about for a hat-pin that had dropped to the floor. One of the French sailors sprang forward, found it, and with a bow of grave deference handed it to her. She thanked him. Then

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it seemed to her that more than anything else in the world she longed for a breath of fresh air. She leaned against the pillar . . .

They walked slowly northward past the warehouses and along the Bund.

"You are tired," he said. "Perhaps — now that it is like this — you would dine with me."

She moved along in silence for a little way. Then, "No," she replied, with a flutter of uncertainty. "I think I ought not to do that. Though I feel that you have earned the right to ask almost anything of me."

"It is not that," he protested.

She was silent.

"But perhaps I may walk with you — to the hotel?"

She felt for her watch, and laughed a little. "It seems as if it must be nearly midnight —"

"It is but seven. A few minutes — half an hour — that is all."

They walked on in an intimate silence that seemed not at all odd.

"It 's no use trying to thank you," she said, after a time. "I was foolish; but you — you were wonderful."

He waved the compliment aside. "I am ashamed. I was not good. Oh, Mademoiselle, I wish you had seen me at the time I fought the great Carpentier."

"You are French?" she asked.

"No, but I have lived much at Paris. My home was

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at Stockholm. And my father was German. I should like to give you my card."

He took one from a silver case, and carefully bent down a corner. By the light of a street lamp she read —" Heinrich von Hagen, Stockholm." And in a lower corner were the words —" Royal Yacht Club."

He gazed moodily out over the river, then turned.

" I can be only frank with you, Mademoiselle. They would call me an adventurer. You will know that men like myself do not come out here to China for no reason — not too often. I was for years in my uncle's Paris office. I forged his name. I came here. It was too much of the box, the billiards, the cards."

" I am sorry," she said.

They agreed to part on the corner near the Astor House. She lingered for a little while, and he stood stiffly like a soldier. There was a discolored bruise under his right eye; the left eye was nearly closed; his mouth was swollen and it twisted queerly when he smiled.

" I have heard tales," he said, with a touch of sadness that was not wholly without bitterness, " of the splendid young ladies in America. It is quite true. You have the self-sufficiency. You walk through life untouched."

She looked thoughtfully at him for a moment, then unclasped her necklace of delicately worked Chinese silver.

" I should like," she murmured, " to feel that you have something of mine."

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He accepted the gift, and raised his hat. And she walked slowly away toward the lights of the Astor House.

Once she turned. He was standing stiffly there, still holding his hat above his head.

Neither the Oldhams nor Lieutenant Carver had arrived; and she waited alone in the lounge adjoining the office. On a nearby table lay a magazine. It brought a curious memory of something that had happened a long time before. She would read it now.

It was after eight by the office clock when the Lieutenant appeared. She saw him enter and pause at the desk, and with new eyes watched him cross the room toward her. Bob was goodlooking. He was a man of vigorous physique, of good mind, of some social attainment. He met every conventional requirement. But she felt, as she observed him, that he was of those who shut their womenkind away from the very arena of actual life in which their own character and destiny is wrought.

"Hello!" he cried. "Alone? Where are the Oldhams?"

"They are n't back yet," said she. Then, "I 'm starved, Bob. Let 's have some dinner."

The Lieutenant hesitated. "Really, Edith," he said, "it would be better to wait. Just on your account. You and I don't mind. But there are people here — ship acquaintances, all that — who would n't understand. At home the chaperone is a rather ab-

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surd nuisance; here a necessity. No use quarreling with the fact. It 's so. Remember — it is Shanghai."

" Yes," she replied drily, with a face that was inscrutable —" That is so. It *is* Shanghai."

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II

THE PEKING PUG

"AND, oh, Edith! While you're in Peking won't you get me one of those darling Peking Pugs — a blue and white one? You can give it to me when we meet at Yokohama. Probably I could buy one in New York, but it would never be the same. I want to *know* that *mine* actually came from the wonderful old city — and direct to me! You just can't imagine how I envy you that part of your tour. I think it was perfectly *dear* of your Uncle and Aunt to take you there! But are n't you just a *teeny* bit afraid, with everybody saying the revolution may break out yet — *any second?*"

Mrs. Wilberly, who was on the couch with one of her nervous headaches, dropped the letter to her lap, saying: "What on earth does Harriet mean by a Peking Pug, Edith?"

Miss Austin turned toward her aunt a girlish face that exhibited no trace of whatever adventurous desires may have been stirring behind it. The hazel eyes were wide and demure. Though she had been lounging in her room all this rather tiresome afternoon, her fluffy brown hair was in place to the last strand, her shirtwaist was immaculate, her perfect-fit-

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ting cloth skirt was as trim as if it had just been ironed to her figure.

"Oh, you know," she replied, rather absently — "tiny sleeve-dog, with long hair and cunning little eyes."

"But who ever heard of a blue and white dog? China ware, porcelain — yes. But a dog!"

"There are queerer things than that in China," replied Miss Austin sagely, opening the door to the adjoining room, then lingering a moment to ask: "Uncle Frank has n't sent any word, has he?"

"No, he 's still out with those English engineers. He says there will be a fortune here in coal and iron after the revolution."

An expression that might have meant great inner impatience flitted across Miss Austin's face. But she composed herself instantly, and gazed with meditative eyes toward the window. "I was just thinking," she mused, "that it might not be too late yet to go out somewhere and buy the dog." She lingered a moment longer, then suddenly turned and entered her own room.

"Be careful about going out alone!" called her aunt, in a voice that rose nervously.

But the door had closed.

Mrs. Wilberly sank back among the cushions and sighed. She wished Frank would give a little of his time to this lively and puzzling young person. It was simply wearing her out. "Girls," she reflected, "are becoming utterly unmanageable — what with all the

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ideas of emancipation and independence they pick up nowadays." That this very hotel, here in the Legation Quarter of Peking, sheltered at the moment a horridly fascinating assemblage of adventurers and adventuresses from every corner of the earth appeared rather to please Edith than otherwise; that until the lull of the past few weeks foreign troops had been arriving by every train and panicky Manchus and Chinese residents had been heaping into carts their gold and silver, their bronzes, ivories, porcelains, *cloisonnés,* silks, jades, and carvings, and streaming frantically out through every gate of the Tartar City, seemed merely to stir the girl to a romantic impatience for the event.

Mrs. Wilberly pressed her hands to her throbbing temples; and reflected on the burden he bears who assumes responsibility for another life.

Miss Austin came slowly down the broad stairway into the main hall of the hotel, pausing on the lowest step for a glance at the gay, exotic scene before her. She made a pleasing picture in her jaunty turban and well tailored costume.

The walls of the passage blazed with the Mandarin coats, skirts, and squares of embroidery that privileged venders were offering for sale. Moving about, chatting quietly, sipping tea or whisky and soda with richly-gowned women, were officers in the uniforms of many nations, nearly all with the blurred eyes of the hard drinker, yet all vigorous of body. Dignified, cynical gentlemen from various legations were in evi-

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dence here and there. Almost at her elbow, two Russians, a Norwegian and a Chinese Mandarin were talking together in French. "Shanghai is n't the Paris of the East," she thought. "This is. A little pasteboard Paris." In a near corner sat a group of weary tourists in wrinkled clothing who were asking one another — snatches of their conversation floated to Edith's ears — whether, in the event of actual revolution, this fortified Legation Quarter would really be safer than the seaport of Tientsin.

Her breath came more quickly, and a barely perceptible heightening of color intensified the beauty of her girlishly immobile face. She was aware, moving slowly through the queerly mixed little gathering, that she ought to resent the really alarming glances of these fascinating officers; but no resentment could stand against the rising sense of sheer adventurous delight that had set her nerves tingling. She had to pick her way around the wizened old native conjuror who was sitting on his heels in the midst of his glass bowls and lacquered flower-pots and mysterious lumpy objects under colored cloths. And as she stepped out on the porch there was a faint, happy smile dancing in her eyes and hovering about her mouth — a smile that died suddenly when she found herself face to face with Captain Waters and the girl-gambler.

She had met the Captain a number of times since he had proved useful to her uncle in arranging one or two rather important introductions. He was a man of nearly middle age, with a close-cropped moustache, a

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flushed face with minute but observable purple veins over the cheek bones and on the nose, watery blue eyes with a network of criss-cross lines under each, and magnificent shoulders. Edith had lately made a point of avoiding him.

The girl-gambler, on the other hand, was easily the most interesting person in the hotel. Apparently she lived there alone. In the dining-room she had a table to herself. Except in the evenings she invariably wore a simple blue middy blouse and a short blue skirt; and her black hair hung loose on her collar, gathered in a bow at the neck. "She makes up for sixteen," thought Edith, "looks twenty, and is probably all of twenty-five."

Miss Austin looked away from the Captain to the girl.

The girl's eyes were a strange, pale blue, the palest eyes Edith had ever seen. In figure she was slim. Her thin face was cold, verging on the ascetic, and appeared always to be under perfect control. A strange, silent person, who appeared to have no friends and no emotions,

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yet was inexplicably attractive. The one definitely known fact regarding her was that she was to be found any evening in the year presiding over a gambling "club" just outside the Quarter and not so far from the Italian *glacis*.

The two moved squarely into the doorway as Edith came out — there was no escaping them. The Captain was saying something in a low voice — something that had to be broken off short in the middle of a word.

The girl returned the gaze with a rather pleasing directness.

Embarrassed, Miss Austin looked away from the Captain to the girl. And the girl, some faintly humorous thought flickering about her pale eyes, returned the gaze with a rather pleasing directness.

Meantime Captain Waters's alcoholic flush had deepened to a rich red. "Miss Austin," he finally got out,—"Miss Carmichael."

The two girls smiled as they bowed; and with that smile went an unexpected wordless flash of understanding.

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"You were going out — alone?" asked the Captain, after a moment.

Miss Austin nodded briskly. "Why not!"

"Well — it will be dark within the hour, Miss Austin."

Edith repressed an impulse to say: "I am perfectly able to take care of myself, thank you!" Instead she merely inquired — "Is n't there a native market nearby where you can buy dogs?"

The Captain looked densely at her without replying; but Miss Carmichael nodded. "Not so near, though," she said. "It 's quite a way up the Hata High Street."

"My dear girl," the Captain put in, quite himself now, and genuinely shocked,—"you were n't thinking of going clean out of the Quarter — by yourself!"

Edith nodded, with smiling eyes but compressed lips.

"Then you must surely let me go with you."

He was insistent. Edith shrank from the prospect. "But after all," she thought, "perhaps it *would* be safer with him than without him, especially as I don't know where the market is. And of course he won't insult me. He'll have to behave."

The Captain hurried in for his coat. Miss Carmichael's eyes followed him; then she turned and looked thoughtfully at Miss Austin. "You won't like my suggesting it," she remarked quietly, "but why don't you wait until morning and go with your own folks."

Miss Austin bristled; and was pointedly silent.

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The girl-gambler gave a little shrug. "I know him," she said. "He 's the wrong sort."

Miss Austin pursed her lips, and turned away. Then the Captain was with them again and was struggling into his coat. He quite unnecessarily took Edith's arm as they started down the steps. She withdrew it and moved away from him, chatting with perfect composure as she walked along. And Miss Carmichael stood looking after them, closely, until they had passed out through the court-yard, stepped into separate rickshaws, and whirled away. For a moment longer she stood there — thinking of this ungoverned, desperate life of "the Coast" through which little Miss Austin was moving with utter innocence but with an adventurous question in her demure eyes. She wondered what that aunt was thinking of. Was she insane? The uncle was a fool of course: all men are fools. But the aunt ought to feel a *little* responsibility. On the Coast, of all places! Did she suppose you can feed a male brute on whisky, gin, and the Coast ladies for five years and then expect him to know adventurous innocence when he sees it? Miss Carmichael started slowly down the steps; hesitated; came back to the porch; hesitated again; and finally stood motionless, her pale eyes turned toward the street and the line of waiting rickshaws. And she drew her thin under lip in between her teeth.

Edith Austin breathed deep and looked about with joy in her heart. For two days she had been cooped

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up in the hotel; now she could fill her healthy young lungs again with the crisp November air. All along Legation Street were soldiers — meek machine-like Germans, snappy little Japanese, slouching American marines, brigandish Italians, loose-breeched French — walking and loafing by twos and threes. There were extra sentries at the gate-house of each Legation compound. Long heaps of reserve sand bags were piled along the curbs like paving-material. From somewhere — nowhere — floated the magic notes of a bugle.

Lifting her eyes she could see the top of the fifty-foot Tartar wall that backs and dominates the Legation Quarter. There were sentries up there too — toy men silhouetted against the radiant sky. Just beyond either end of the confines of the Quarter, more than a mile apart, loomed the great square pagodas over the Chien and Hata gates. She knew that these, like the wall, were occupied now — the Hatamen by German troops, the Chienmen by American,— in order that the perils of 1900 might not be invited again. Each structure stood broad and high two hundred feet and more. And even in the fading, vari-colored light of the afterglow she could distinguish the gay reds and blues and greens of the painted woodwork and the intricately carved outlines of the curving eaves.

The hotel might be a pasteboard Paris; this, *this* was Peking — Peking the swarming, Peking the ramshackle, Peking the barbaric, Peking the enchanting. Hidden somewhere to the south were the glories and

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grotesqueries of the Temple of Heaven. At their backs, northwest, stood the red brick walls and the glazed yellow roofs of the Forbidden City. She wished, for the moment, that the scattered mutterings of revolution might really gather and break. Then perhaps the royal Manchu family would flee again through those sacred gates as in 1900; perhaps beautiful, painted harem girls would seek refuge here in the Quarter; perhaps wonderful old eunuchs, right out of Marco Polo and the Arabian Nights, would come flying in terror from within the secret walls that had hidden the intrigues of an empire.

For a moment the two rickshaws ran side by side. Captain Waters looked across at the glowing face beside him; then, with speeding pulse, dropped his eyes.

A German sentry stopped them at the East Gate, marked the Captain's uniform, saluted, and stood aside. They swung across the flat *glacis* to the wide and populous Hata Street. As they turned north, the Captain showed his teeth and pointed ahead. The light was fading fast, but she could make out a long string of laden camels approaching, swaying and dipping and winding above the traffic of the street like an endless brown serpent.

"You see," he called across, "the danger is past now. Traffic is going on again. You can trust John Chinaman's instinct."

Edith looked about. Hundreds of yellow-skinned ones were passing; coolies in tatters or bare of back and leg, merchants in long blue gabardines and black

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skull caps with red buttons. A few young men caught her eye, fell in and ran behind her, shouted Oriental insults and swelled to a crowd.

The rickshaws were close. "Are you sure it is safe?" asked Edith.

The Captain scattered them with a look and a word. "Perfectly," he replied then. "They would do this any time. There's always some anti-foreign feeling, you know."

"Baron von Ketteler was killed here in 1900!" he called, a moment later, indicating a marble arch that spanned the road. They passed under it and on, on deeper into the heart of the Tartar City. A thousand yellow sparkles were twinkling now in the fringe of shops on either side of the highway; a row of electric lights suddenly flared out overhead.

The Captain shouted at the rickshaw men. They turned off, picked a way through the crowd, and entered a narrow side-street. It was nearly dark here. The Captain stepped down and came to her side.

"We'll leave the rickshaws here," he said, "and have a look-see on foot."

He reached up to take her hand, but she eluded him and leaped to the pavement as nimbly as a boy. As she did so she was uncomfortably aware that his eyes were intent on the free movements of her slim body. Then he took her arm and guided her along the crowded footway, up the dim little street.

They stopped before a row of barred and shuttered buildings.

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"That's what I was afraid of," said the Captain easily. "We're too late. Not much doing here after nightfall, you know. They haven't learned yet all that artificial light will do for them. I guess it's a case of go back to the hotel — that is, if you feel you must hurry." He consulted his watch. "It's early — not much after five. We might walk along the big street and see the sights."

Miss Austin looked squarely at him and shook her head. "No," she said, "we'll go back."

There was something in the quality of her voice that caused him to relax his hold on her arm. A puzzled expression flitted into his eyes, and out again.

"See," he observed in a casual voice, as they turned, —"if you are still thinking of any possible danger, look at that."

Wheeling into the narrow way from the Hatamen Street came an imposing procession of mule-litters and carts, preceded by a huge, gaudily decorated Sedan-chair with eight bearers and as many outrunners.

"It's some rich Chinaman," the Captain went on, "coming back with his wives and his treasures. A fortnight ago they were all flying to the seacoast for foreign protection. This tells the story. If there was the slightest danger you'd never see that outfit turning into this street. John, I tell you, is a wise person — the wisest on earth."

The natives were crowding against the buildings to

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make way for the great man. Miss Austin stood on tiptoe and looked over a blue shoulder.

Behind the glass front of the red chair some object was moving. It was a face, doubtless the face of the personage. She looked past it to the row of three, four, five litters. Was there a wife — or a concubine — shut away in each? How would it seem to be one of a man's several women? That was certainly what you had to submit to in China. Perhaps — she was thinking of the man at her side with the big shoulders and the watery blue eyes — perhaps the experience was not wholly unknown to the secretmost hearts of patient women in Western lands. She wished she had n't come with him — even moved half a step away from him, almost against a staring yellow man. Why did men have to be like that? Why were they always brushing your hand, or holding your arm, or scheming to build up the preliminaries of a kiss? She controlled a physical impulse to shudder. If the man only knew how she hated, *hated* to be touched.

A dark figure appeared on a roof farther down the street, at a point that the red chair was about to pass. He wore baggy trousers and leggings, a carbine slung across his back, a small turban on his head, and on his left wrist a falcon. By this token she knew him for a Manchu.

The man slowly raised his right hand, poised it for an instant, then threw something that might have been a piece of pipe and that circled slowly, end over end, into the shadows of the street.

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"A bomb!"

She heard the word; then before her mind could compass the situation Captain Waters lifted her off

He was gripping her close in his iron left arm.

the ground and almost threw her back into a recessed doorway.

There was an explosion that flattened her against the wood as if it meant to drive her through, that

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tore at her ear drums, that rocked the ground under her feet, that hurled sprawling figures against her. For a moment she was unconscious. She must have fallen into the Captain's arms. Certainly, when her brain cleared, he was gripping her close in his iron left arm, and his right hand was in the act of lowering an automatic pistol. She wondered if he had been shooting.

Her eyes opened wider, and she made an effort to free herself. It must have been a weak effort, for he paid not the slightest attention to it. He was staring out into the little street, that was now a smoking litter of wreckage. The dust got into her throat and made her cough. Her eyes smarted dreadfully. The Captain raised his revolver again, hesitated, then lowered it. She tried to make out what he was looking at, and then peered up and down the roadway.

The red chair had disappeared entirely; indeed what appeared to be a piece of it was lying almost at her feet. Where it had been when the bomb fell the street was choked with a confused tangle of bricks, boards, mules, and human bodies.

The Captain suddenly turned and looked straight down at her. The expression in his eyes first frightened then angered her. She tried again to push him away, but realized, with a sinking of the heart, that she was weak and faint. In her confusion of mind it did not occur to her that she had been resting there within his arm for a moment without struggling.

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There was something horribly direct about that look in his eyes.

"It 's strange — strange," he was saying, "how things happen. It took this thing to throw us together. Cost some lives, too." Her head sank, and she pushed weakly against his chest with her elbow. His lips brushed her ear. "Cost some lives, but here we are. Queer world — eh, what! Oh, you beauty — you raving little beauty, you! Set me wild when I first saw you — been crazy for you — and here we are! . . . But let's get out of here, for God's sake! You make me forget everything. Quick — keep close to me — this way, along the wall!"

Could n't the man understand? Could n't he see that she had fainted, that she — was going to — faint again. . . . She jerked her head back and drew in a quick breath of the choking air. At least he had relaxed the grip of that awful arm. There he was now, moving sidewise, back to the wall, looking out ahead but groping for her with his free hand. She caught his sleeve and followed. To this extent he was right; he must at least get her safely to the main road. As she stumbled forward the whole strange episode passed again before her mind's eye like a stage play. It was absurdly real. It *could n't* have happened.

"Look out here!" shouted the Captain. "Step up!"

She obeyed; and stepped on, then over, a human body.

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Moaning sounds came from the dark tangle in the street. A mule was waving his hoofs and scrambling; while she watched, the animal got to its feet and staggered out of the dark, cluttered *impasse* into the Hata Street.

A man stumbled blindly against her, and groaned. She had to shoulder him off as she moved slowly forward. Frantic natives were now running from the more or less wrecked shops and dwellings, waving their hands and wailing in falsetto. Children were crying. Two young girls came slowly out of a house from which the front wall had been almost entirely removed. For a moment they blocked the way, looking on with dazed, blank eyes. Their foreheads, noses, and chins were white with powder; their straight, slanting eyebrows were heavily blackened; their cheeks glistened with red paint; and the mouth of each was a perfect Cupid's bow of bright carmine. Their shining black hair was built up into elaborate coiffures. Their dress was the embroidered short coat and trousers of the Chinese gentlewoman who is supposed never to appear in public. And they were beautiful, with a haunting Oriental beauty.

Captain Waters thrust them roughly aside and pressed forward, dragging Miss Austin with him over and through the wreckage. They passed this spot none too rapidly; for a window-corner gave way a second later, and a puff of smoke curled out. The shutters of a shop across the street were already blazing. Two men were slapping at it with their coats,

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but the fire played nimbly in and out among the boards, ran up the door-casing, and spread in a burst of light along the eaves.

The two were past the thickest of the wreckage and perhaps half-way out of the street when the Captain again pressed her into a doorway. Edith peered out around his bulky person. The street blazed with light now; by it she could see a number of brown-faced men in blue turbans running in from the Hatamen Street. They had knives at their belts, and carried heavy, naked swords that glittered with damascene work and inlaid silver. They were silent, and weirdly business-like. Those in advance stopped at the first bodies and swiftly looked them over; picked off rings, ear and hair ornaments, purses, and jewelled girdles.

Captain Waters drew a second pistol from his pocket and thrust it into her hand.

"Can you use it?" he asked.

She nodded.

"It 's the Manchus. Looks as if they 're pulling off the mutiny after all. Listen —!"

Over the moaning and wailing and chattering, over the crackling of a fire that was now roaring out through heavily tiled roofs, came to their ears a faint boom — another — a sudden series. Then, somewhere nearer at hand, a sharp, sputtering rattle. "That 's a machine-gun!" cried the Captain.

More of the Manchu soldiers were now pouring into the street. Here and there groups of them were fighting over the loot. Three men with carbines on

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their backs and old-fashioned revolvers in their hands crowded up to the doorway in which Miss Austin and the Captain were sheltered. The foremost raised his weapon, peered over it at their white faces and at the Captain's uniform; then, to her astonishment, smiled and bowed. Captain Waters returned the bow stiffly. There was a brief exchange of words in an unintelligible singsong. The Captain made way, and drew her aside with him. The soldiers bowed again, with perfect Oriental suavity, then threw their weight against the door, bore it from its hinges, and plunged in over it.

"Better take our chance in getting out of this," said Captain Waters. "He insists that they're not touching foreigners. Anyhow, we'd soon be cooked in here."

They moved slowly along toward the highway. It was lighter now, and the looters were working with desperate speed. One of them, a giant Tartar with a split lip, had carried the body of a woman from a wrecked litter to a doorstep and propped it up. The dead girl, young and slender, clad in a long robe of red silk with embroidery in gold thread on the shoulders and sleeves, looked almost alive as she half lay, half sat, with her head supported by the door frame. One arm was doubled stiffly across her chest, as if clasping some precious object. The crouching soldier glanced around from his prize as Miss Austin and her escort approached, saw the pistol in Edith's hand, and

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smiled up at her admiringly; then turned back to tear a ruby ornament from the ear of the dead girl.

They had got nearly to the Hata Street when the Captain again stopped and held her close to the wall.

"Better go slow here," he said. "There may be trouble outside. Keep ready with that pistol."

There was again something disturbing in his nearness to her. His voice had become hoarse and unsteady, and he seemed to be trying not to look at her. The veins stood out sharply on his flushed temple. Not knowing what to say or do, she raised the pistol and showed him that her finger was caressing the trigger.

Suddenly he turned and looked deep into her eyes.

"Maybe I was too — well, too rough back there," he began, a note of excitement rising in his voice as he went on. Edith felt herself growing cold and shrinking back against the wall. "Maybe I took too much for granted — perhaps you did n't mean it. God, how do I know what you mean! But feeling you there by me — in my arms — your face so near. . . ."

Again his arms were about her shoulders, holding her close to him. A blaze of hot anger rushed up within her. She wrestled her right arm free and waved the pistol unsteadily.

"My God, girl!" he cried. "You don't mean —" Then he caught her wrist.

Suddenly Miss Austin's tense body relaxed. Her face lighted with a shock of surprise that ran swiftly

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off into relief. For picking her way coolly up the narrow street, her long blanket coat thrown back exposing a blue middy blouse, a boy's plaid cap on her head, a matter-of-fact expression on her thin face, was the girl-gambler.

Captain Waters caught the expression on Miss Austin's face, and was puzzled. Then he turned.

"Hello," said Miss Carmichael coolly. "I followed you up. Thought I 'd like one of those dogs myself." She was quietly looking them over as she spoke. "The row 's most finished, I guess. The police are running all over the place. They 'll be in here before long, cutting off heads. Better get out before they begin — it 's so spattery."

The Captain was biting upward at his moustache. "Think we 'll have trouble getting back?"

"We might, a little. But it 's unnecessary. There 's a mission within five minutes of here — American, too. Let 's get her over there. . . . Say, Miss Austin, there 's someone trying to talk to you back there. Friend of yours?"

The Tartar of the split lip, still squatting by the body in the red and gold robe, was beckoning and smiling eagerly. He pointed at his prize, and beckoned again.

"He certainly thinks he 's got a joke there," said Miss Carmichael. "Watch him."

The soldier, still laughing heartily, raised the arm that was clasped across the dead girl's breast and prodded at the embroidered sleeve. Out crawled the

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smallest dog Edith had ever seen — a jet black, almost blue-black, silky-haired, pugnosed little creature with one white ear. The hair of his back and sides hung almost to his feet. His beady eyes peered out through a black and white jungle. If he had not been so absurdly small — surely no more than seven or eight inches in length — he might almost have passed for a cocker spaniel. As it was, there was no mistaking him.

"A Peking Pug!" cried Miss Austin. All the inner torment of the past ten minutes dropped from her like a discarded cloak. Her eyes danced. Her pistol clattered to the pavement and was forgotten; she did not even know that the Captain, with a queer, dense expression of face, picked it up and without a word put it in his pocket. Nor was she aware that the strangely pale eyes of Miss Carmichael were studying them both out of a cool, expressionless face.

The soldier gathered up the dog in one hand, shook it playfully, and held it out. Miss Austin ran back and took it.

"Is it really for me?" she cried, wholly unconscious that she was speaking in English to a Manchu. "Oh, how nice of you! Thank you ever, *ever* so much!"

The soldier rose and bowed, clasping his hands before his breast. Edith had never seen a man bow with such utter grace; she suddenly felt crude, as if she were the barbarian. Then, still smiling, as with a pleasing memory, the Tartar knelt by the body of the dead girl and swiftly, one after another, tore the

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Still smiling, the Tartar knelt by the body of the dead girl and swiftly tore the gold-mounted rubies from her fingers.

gold-mounted rubies from her fingers.

The native police were ranging the Hata Street, beheading looters as they caught them. The shooting had stopped, excepting the occasional crack of a revolver to the southward. Every house and shop was closed; every private light was out. A primitive fire-company, dashing to the scene of trouble in the market street, had the deserted highway almost to itself.

The big white man and the two girlish figures walked northward in silence.

"Are you all right?" whispered Miss Carmichael, when the two had fallen a little behind. "Was he ugly?"

Miss Austin was cuddling the dog close to her face, like a muff. At the question she puckered her brows

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as if trying to remember something, and a look of pain came into her pretty eyes.

"Oh — it hardly matters now," she said. And then, as if realizing the girlish inadequacy of her reply, added: "But it *was* good of you to come."

Miss Carmichael fell silent. But when the Captain started to turn in toward the gate of the mission compound she rested a light hand on his arm and whispered something. Then she herself rang the bell; and when a Chinese servant answered, pressed back against the wall and kept the Captain by her.

"Go in," she called to Miss Austin,—"go in. Good-night. Don't forget that your dog is a delicate little mite. Don't give him meat without chopping it very fine. Good-night."

"Why —" faltered Miss Austin —"aren't you coming too?"

"No — not in there. You're best alone. It's safe enough for us, now that the row's over." And slipping her arm through the Captain's, she hurried him away.

Well around the corner she stopped short, clasped her two hands about the Captain's big forearm, and looked up into his face that was baffled and sullen. "What's the matter, Jim?" she whispered.

"Never you mind," he growled.

"You were roughing it with the girl. I saw it. I didn't think you were a dirty coward, Jim. But I guess you are. You're like the rest — one of the worst, really. They've kept you on the Coast too

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long. It 's got you, the way it gets all of them sooner or later. Sometimes — I even think it 's got — me."

"Did n't think anything would ever get you," muttered the Captain.

"Never mind that now. What about this girl? Have n't you got *any* brains left? Can't you *see* she does n't talk our language? Can't you see she 's *decent,* Jim?"

Captain Waters chewed his lip. "How was I to help it! She had me going — I was crazy. I can't — now look here, I 've got to go back to that dam' hotel and talk to her uncle and try to remember I 'm an officer. An officer — oh, God! . . . Guess you 're right, Dixie. The Coast 's got me. It 's got me, all right. But talking this way don't help. I 'd like to know what I 'm to do. I 've got to go back to that dam' hotel — I —"

"Shut up, Jim," said Miss Carmichael. Still clasping his arm, she leaned back against the wall. Her face looked white and delicate in the faint light. Her usually hard mouth had softened. "There 's a few things I ain't, Jim," she breathed. "I 'm a gambler, yes. I work for big Tex Connor of Shanghai, yes. But there 's a few things I ain't. There 's no man ever made love to me in Peking — not in Peking . . . Jim, you leave that girl alone. Do you get me? They 'll only be here a week or two. I guess there 's a little plain manhood left in you somewhere." She caught her breath. Her pale eyes were luminous. Something that might have been either a sob or a bit-

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ter little laugh escaped her. Under pretence of brushing back a straying lock of hair she covered her face for a moment with her hand. Then her head drooped and sank against his breast. His arm slid about her shoulders.

"Let that child alone, Jim," she murmured. "I — I 'll help you, Jim, if — if — Let her alone, that 's all!"

Captain Waters, between density, surprise, and weakness, looked down at the dark head against his coat. "Hell," he muttered, "you 're acting as if you *cared* about her!"

Then he kissed her.

A Khaki-clad sergeant of marines (on special duty) held conference with four grave missionaries in the big house at the head of the compound. Five minutes later a rocket swished and soared in a slow curve high above the roofs of the Tartar City, North, by the great Hata Street. Twenty minutes more and a long column of troops — slouching fellows in gray campaign hats — came shuffling up on the double quick, whistling to a man "I 'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy" (Cohan version) as an accelerant to the step.

While the beardless captain, leaving his Kentucky horse at the gate, entered the compound, two sergeants conversed by the long line of fighting men in the road. One stood on his two legs and grinned unreservedly. The other leaned on a New Model Springfield and softly tapped his fixed bayonet.

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"Let that child alone, Jim. I — I 'll help you, Jim, if — if — Let her alone, that 's all!"

"How many men did ye bring on th' dangerous mission, Pete?" inquired the one.

"A full comp'ny — hundred an' six."

"Th' last-mentioned six would 'a' done, Pete."

"Then why, in the name iv —"

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"Tut, tut, me boy. 'T is holy ground ye 're all but standin' on. 'T was a little matter iv th' tellyphone wires bein' down. An' th' exercise ull be fine f'r th' boys. Not to say there ain't a bit o' class to th' young lady that thinks mebbe she 'd like to go back to th' hotel — *an'* her dog."

So it came about that forty men in Khaki with fixed bayonets marched in rigid fours before the rickshaw of Miss Austin, and sixty-six men marched as rigidly by fours behind. Of whistling there was none. And to the beardless Captain who rode beside her desperately thinking up common acquaintances she confided impulsively: "I never realized before that our own soldiers were so goodlooking. Why, it 's just like being with a lot of the boys at home."

To which the beardless one replied: "Well, of course, in the Marine Corps — have to be picked men, in a way — you see, the work we do . . ." And inasmuch as his baritone voice had been found pleasing by the ladies of many ports, he hummed blithely:

From the halls of Montezumas to the shores of Tripolee
We fight our country's battles on the land and on the sea.

When they reached the hotel he said good-night and then shook hands twice.

Miss Austin smuggled the morsel of a dog under her coat and went directly to her own room. Here her first task was to make Wing Tee Wee — which was his new name; as was fitting, for did it not stand that

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"Wing Tee Wee was a sweet Chinee?"— to make Wing as comfortable as possible exactly in the middle of the broad white bed.

Then she confronted the mirror, and momentarily depressed by the wan, pallid face that stared out at her, slapped her cheeks and rubbed her temples and forehead to bring the color back. After which she rearranged her somewhat tousled hair, and dressed for dinner.

Looking only a little less than her usual brisk self, she sat on the edge of the bed and examined little Wing with great care.

"Yes," she said, holding him up to the light and playing with his one white ear, "you may not be quite the same sort of blue-and-white as the dishes and vases, but that wonderful hair of yours is certainly about as near blue as black can be."

As if in reply, Wing threw back his head and made the smallest sound that was ever dignified by the term of barking. Miss Austin laughed softly, and cuddled him close against her pretty neck.

There was a knock at the door, and Mrs. Wilberly, still in negligé and drowsy of eye, came in from the adjoining room.

"I've had quite a nap," she observed. Then — "Oh, you got that dog!"

Her niece nodded brightly, and held him up for inspection.

"He *is* cunning," mused Mrs. Wilberly. "But — oh, yes! It was n't a dog Harriet wanted. Wait a

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minute — I can show you on the letter. We read it wrong. It is n't a P at all. It 's meant for an R. But the pen points spread out on the last down stroke, and the ink did n't run. If you look closely — There! You can see the little scratches. It 's a rug she wants, not a pug — a Peking Rug."

"Oh, I see," replied Miss Austin demurely. "It was a natural enough mistake, though. And it 's just as well, because now I can keep Wing for myself. . . . Look at him, Aunt! Did you ever in your life see anything so perfectly *darling?*"

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III

CHARLIE SNYDER

"I DON'T exactly like the idea of being burned up," said Miss Austin thoughtfully.

"But we can't burn here — in the Legation Quarter," insisted the bony woman from Kansas City,— "with everything solid masonry, and an open space all around it — and the soldiers."

Miss Austin moved over to the window and looked out at the roaring sky. She was very trim and girlish. She wore a watch strapped to her left wrist. Her left hand swung her brown shopping-bag to and fro as she gazed out at the extraordinarily brilliant spectacle of burning Peking. Somewhere to the westward a roof fell in; a spurt of flame shot up, threw off down the wind a shining flame of sparks, and painted its own momentary glory in red against the smoke cloud behind and above it.

At the sight the pupils of Miss Austin's hazel eyes expanded a very little, the color deepened in her cheeks, and the muscles about her pretty mouth twitched with inner excitement; but in a moment her face resumed its usual girlishly demure expression.

The months of uncertainty were over for the curious assemblage of diplomats, tourists, bankers, cor-

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respondents, soldiers of all nations and Chinese refugees that packed the fortified Legation Quarter,— the months that had alternated strangely between panic and a commonplace quiet. It is now the evening of February 29th, 1912. On the third of December Nanking had fallen; Peking, it appeared, was falling to-night.

"I don't exactly like the idea of being burned up," she said.

Edith raised her left hand and glanced at her watch; — twenty minutes to nine.

Faintly to Edith's ears, above the roar of fifteen square miles of burning buildings, came the crack, rattle and boom of large and small arms. They were fighting out there, Manchus and Chinese — fighting, plundering, ravishing. All that was most primitive and beastly in this backward people was loose this night. The women, out there, were undoubtedly by this time at the final business of killing themselves. The modern stone gutters that bordered the very modern pavements of

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the ancient city were serving the ancient purpose of draining off human blood.

Miss Austin compressed her lips, and turned. "My people will be simply worried to death," she said. "Aunt is just about down sick, and Uncle had to get her over to the special train without waiting for me to finish dressing; but he understood that I was coming on with you. Now if you decide not to go. . . . And the train leaves at nine!"

"I 'm sure I don't know what to say," replied the bony woman. "If my husband would only get back! You see he is n't all packed, even — What are you going to do, Miss Austin?"

This question was prompted by the sight of Edith moving toward the door.

"I left Wing loose in my room."

With which rather inadequate reply, Miss Austin went out.

Arriving in her own room, she stood for a moment with pursed lips gazing down at the absurd little Pekingese dog on the bed. Then she looked at her watch. "Come, Wing," she remarked, with sudden decision; and cuddling him on her arm, she picked up her traveling bag and umbrella with her free hand and left the room and the hotel.

Outside, where usually stood a line of importunate rickshaw coolies, there were only the huddling refugees from the Tartar City. She made her way hurriedly through the crowd that swarmed over pavement and sidewalk alike. Here and there a pair of almond

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eyes stared at her. One big brown man elbowed close to her and laughed. A European officer in a green uniform lifted his hat and bowed, an ugly insistence in his eyes. At this her step quickened; when she passed through the opening in the great Tartar wall she was almost running.

The approaches to the railway station were congested with laden carts and disorderly piles of boxes and crates and panic-stricken human beings. Even here in the shadow of the wall that towered forty or fifty feet above them, light from the burning city flickered redly on yellow faces and threw denser shadows in between the cluttered heaps of household goods. Men were shouting. Women and children were wailing. Somewhere up ahead a locomotive was coughing.

Glancing anxiously at her watch, Miss Austin struggled slowly toward the noise of that locomotive. A motor-car blocked the way, wedged in between two carts. She got past by climbing over the forward mud-guard. The chauffeur, a Chinese boy, watched her with an impassive smile.

She could see a part of the train now. It was full of white men and women; there were faces at every window. Blue-clad Chinamen with blanched faces were clinging to the platforms and steps between the cars and to each other. Many had climbed to the roofs of the cars. There were soldiers up there, too, on the roofs; American Marines, she thought, from their olive drab clothing and dust-gray campaign hats. She had to keep turning and twist-

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ing to protect Wing from the pressure of the crowd. Her watch, as she hugged the dog close, was right by the little black and white head. She could see that the minute hand was all but on the hour . . . closer . . . it *was* on the hour.

There was a sudden quick rhythm in the coughing of the engine. A bell began to ring. Her heart sank; for the cars were moving. Wing was looking up at her, his tiny eyes shining out through the tangle of silky black and white hair like glistening beads. He reached out a diminutive tongue and licked her chin.

Miss Austin stopped, in some concern as to what she should do next. The train was gone — that much was clear. She turned back, then paused to look up at the red sky. She shrank from the thought of returning to the doomed city, even to the guarded Legation Quarter. But certainly she could n't stay here in this wild mob about the station. It was to be the hotel and that bony woman from Kansas City, apparently. That or nothing.

The crowd, that had been surging toward the train, was now falling back. She found an opening between two stacks of freight, and started through it.

At the same moment an American Marine, a private apparently, rushed into the narrow opening from the other side. He was young, and not over tall. At least, her eyes and his, when they met, seemed nearly on a level. His eyes were blue and mild. His luxuriant hair, partly exposed by the backward tilt of his campaign hat, was light brown and curly. His nose

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"I'm positively *certain* I must have danced with him, somewhere."

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was short, and it tipped up at the end. His mouth, set above a rather small chin, was large and of an amiable, easy-smiling inclination. He wore the full equipment of the campaign soldier — blanket-roll looped over one shoulder, knapsack, khaki-covered canteen, revolver, bayonet, and bulging cartridge pockets; and he trailed a rifle. He was flushed, and a little blown, as from hard running. He was, everything considered, astonishingly attractive. It had not occurred to Edith that a private soldier *could* be so attractive. For one thing, he was utterly, comfortably American. "He looks almost as if I had met him at the Country Club back home," she thought swiftly, "or having soda in Williams's drug store. It 's queer, but I 'm positively *certain* I must have danced with him, somewhere." He was hardly older than herself — certainly not more than twenty-one or two.

The soldier, with a breathless "Excuse me, Miss Austin!" stepped aside in order to pass her. But she stepped the same way; and they stood face to face. In some confusion she stepped back, just as he did the same. Again they confronted each other.

Then he smiled — not disrespectfully, she thought, with an odd and rather absurd little flutter in her mind — and resting his shoulder against a packing-case, drew a long breath. He had extraordinarily white, even teeth.

"Guess it 's no use, Miss Austin," he said. "The train 's gone."

"Yes," she replied ruefully, "it 's gone."

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He took her in for a moment, with a good-nature that was too easily and frankly of the home-town spirit to be in the least offensive. Then his mobile face sobered and assumed an expression of sympathy.

"Were you left behind?" he asked.

She held the tiny dog against her face and nodded over it with eyes that were suddenly misty.

"Folks gone?"

Again she nodded.

"Well, well," said he. Then he whistled very softly. "Hm!" he mused, in a brown study.

Edith wished he would say something more to the point than "Hm!" and "Well, well!"

His eyes wandered off down the track where the train had disappeared, then back toward the burning city. Suddenly he seemed to hit upon an idea. He straightened up; and an expression of soldier-like determination came over his face. He glanced back over his shoulder, as if seeking something. Then he turned to Edith, and asked, quite casually: "Do you want to go to Tientsin — now?"

Edith, still holding Wing against her face, nodded.

"Then come with me," said the extraordinary soldier. "I 'm in bad myself," he explained cheerfully, as he led the way back along the platform. "I had instructions to leave a message at our Attaché's house and rejoin the Company here. Could n't make it."

He led her straight to the motor-car that she had had to climb over. It was a large touring-car with the top down; apparently of French make. Oil and

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acetylene lamps were all lighted, despite the glare from beyond the wall. The Chinese chauffeur was still in his seat, and was still blandly smiling. The carts that had blocked his way were gone now.

The soldier drew his revolver, and uttered a Chinese word.

The smile faded from the boy's face, and he hopped nimbly to the ground.

"Get in," said the soldier to Miss Austin.

She hesitated, looked at him with startled eyes, bit her lip, then stepped up into the front seat. On the instant she reconsidered and started to her feet. But the soldier waved her back into the seat, cranked up, and leaped in beside her. The big car bounded forward.

A pack of screaming yellow children, with faces like painted eggs, tumbled headlong out of the way. Muleteers plied their whips to make room. In a moment, as it seemed, they were out of the press about the station and were headed southward on the Chienmen Road across the Chinese city. Through the occasionally tangled traffic and the scurrying natives, the soldier picked his way with skill.

She stole a sidelong glance at him. He seemed to feel it. They were in a relatively clear space. He flashed a look at her. Their eyes met, in the brilliant flickering light. As she wrenched hers away and gazed off at the row of gaudily decorated one-story houses that bordered the wide street, she could feel the hot color rushing to her cheeks and temples.

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"It's eighty-odd miles to Tientsin," he said. "And we're either going there or we're not — more about that later. How are you standing it?"

Edith looked with an odd, absorbed expression at her watch.

"It's some experience!" said he, with a sudden glow in his voice. "I haven't the remotest idea whose car this is. The Lord knows how far we're going to get in it and what's going to happen to us. But I'll say this right now, before any of it happens — you're a sport clear through."

Edith's ears burned. But she was still gazing at the watch on her wrist.

"I was thinking," she said soberly, with a slight huskiness in her voice, "that it is only six minutes past nine. I've known you just six minutes."

Suddenly she raised her head, closed her eyes tight for a fraction of a second, and then, cuddling Wing close, gazed out along the open road before them, and managed a nervous little laugh.

"It *is* an experience!" she said.

He was watching her through narrowed eyelids. He drew in a slow breath between partly opened lips; then brought himself back to his task. They were clear of the city now. The big car leaped forward like a dog off the leash. It bounded lightly over the rough old road. It swerved and swung delicately around the plodding carts and litters of the native families that were blindly carrying their treasures off toward the protection of the white men by the sea. It swayed

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like a birch canoe. And it sang, as it swayed and leaped and swerved, like a homing bee.

"How did you know my name?" she asked, with a sudden recollection.

They were heading more to the southeastward, in the region where the Peking-Tientsin highway swings around the end of the old Royal Hunting Park. The sky was now more dimly red behind them; and the acetylene lamps were cutting holes of light through the darkness ahead.

He did not reply at once. She thought that he had not heard, and repeated her question.

"Why — it 's like this —" he began hesitatingly. Then he seemed to remember. "I was in the company that went out to the American mission that night, to fetch you in."

Edith looked back. There was a patch of dull red off there in the northeast; that was all. The stars were distinct now. She looked up, holding tight to the seat with her free hand. How the car lurched and jumped! She looked at her soldier. He was driving desperately through the night over one of the worst roads in the world, but with easy assurance. He was only a boy — a nice American boy!

She wished her pulse would quiet down. Even now as she looked at him, she knew that her color was rising again. She was glad that the starlight was faint and that he would not know. She wondered if ever

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before in the world a girl and a man had been caught up and whirled into so utterly romantic an episode. It was n't his fault. And it certainly was n't hers. It was disconcerting — yes. It was carrying her faster than she could think. But it was perfect. She had never before felt exactly like this.

The car plunged honking through a sleeping village. The low houses of mud brick with curving tile roofs nestled close along the road. All were dark, as if asleep like the unthinking folk within. They breathed out the peace of resignation, the age-old spirit of China.

The village watchman, open-mouthed, gong in hand, pressed against the wall of a house as they swept by.

Then the village was gone. The flat, open countryside lay wide beneath the stars. Something within made her catch her breath, as her eyes roved from one dim horizon line to the other. She looked up again at the stars.

The soldier glanced around. Their eyes were very close. He smiled. Even in that faint light she could see his white teeth. It was pleasant to see them.

" God's own guides," he said, nodding upward, then bent his gaze on the road.

She did not catch the phrase. Without looking at her he repeated, again with a jerk of his head indicating the star-sprinkled sky overhead,—

" ' They 're God's own guides on the old trail.' "

" Oh," she murmured,—" yes. I did n't hear. I love Kipling."

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It was an hour later. The soldier was driving more slowly. A new sound was coming to her ears — a soft, musical whine, a faint singing in the air that was barely distinguishable over the steady purring of the motor. It came again — and again. It was ominous; she could not have said why.

Then she caught another sound. It was very faint and far-away. It sounded, she thought, like champagne-corks popping in another room. Wing stirred in her arms, and she realized that she was holding him too tightly.

Again she heard that whining sound. It ended abruptly with a *zut!*

The engine, that had been running smoothly and sweetly, suddenly exploded — once, twice — like a pistol shot at their feet; and the car, at the same moment, took to jerking violently. There was a flash of light behind then that for an instant lighted the road and a row of abandoned carts beside it. Then the soldier, with an exclamation, drove his foot down on the brake-pedal, the car stopped short, and Edith pitched forward.

He caught her arm with a strong hand just as her knees touched the dash board, and drew her back into the seat. For a moment he stood over her, his hand on her shoulder. She wondered, in a momentary flash of cool intelligence, why she did not shake it off. Every nerve in her body was conscious of the pressure of that hand. An impulse came to ask what was the matter; but she said nothing, merely lifted Wing and

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held him against her cheek. She felt, rather than saw, that her soldier was standing erect, looking out ahead. Again that singing whine, overhead. She began to understand now; it was the song of a bullet. The corks were still popping, away-off in the darkness.

The soldier bent quickly down then, until his face was close to hers. She wondered, thinking with great rapidity, what he meant to do; and shrank back in the seat. He relaxed his grip on her shoulder, deliberately put his arm about her, slipped his other arm under her knees, picked her up as if she were a child, swung her around and, himself kneeling on the seat, gently deposited her on the floor of the tonneau.

Never before in her independent young life had a man taken her in his arms. Danger, even, seemed no excuse that this man should do so now. She could have prevented it. She could have leaped over the seat back as lightly as he. Yet for a moment he had held her against him, her soft turban and hair and forehead had brushed his cheek. Now his arm lingered caressingly about her shoulders as he moved his canteen and knapsack from under her feet and arranged the blanket-roll at her back. And she was meekly submitting, holding fast to the tiny dog in her lap and turning up to him a white, inquiring face.

For a moment he leaned down close to that face, looking into it.

"Stay right here," he said gently. "The car is protection enough, I think, for now. They're not shoot-

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ing at us, but we seem to be right in the line of fire of a skirmish down the line."

"Where are *you* going?" she asked anxiously, as he straightened up.

"I 've got to look over the engine," he replied, "and find out what they did to us. Be back in a minute."

He disappeared. She could hear him moving about, tinkering with the engine, and striking matches. It seemed a long time. The corks were still popping intermittently. Every minute or so a bullet sang by.

"Please come!" she called, a little catch of excitement in her voice.

He laughed softly, and called back: "In a minute."

He struck more matches. Soon she felt the car-body move as he leaped up in front. Then appeared a heavy boot and a sturdy calf enclosed in a laced legging, feeling its way toward a footing. She caught the ankle and guided it. A moment and he was crowded in beside her. She sat forward and made an effort to give him part of the blanket; but he crouched down beside her, took her two shoulders in his hands and firmly pressed her back against it.

"You just make yourself comfortable," he said. "We 're up against it — for fair. We can't go on, on foot even, while they 're fighting. So just make up your mind to settle down and make the best of it."

"My mind 's all right," she replied. His hands were still on her shoulders. She moved uneasily, but

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he did not take them away. "What happened?"

"Queerest accident I ever heard of. A rifle ball hit the interrupter box of the magneto."

"Can you repair it?"

"Hardly," said he, shaking his head.

The hands on her shoulders seemed as if charged with some current subtler than electricity. His eyes were on hers. She had to fight down an impulse to sway toward him. She made a desperate effort to control herself.

"Things are pretty serious, then, are n't they?" she asked.

His face was very close.

"Very," he replied. And his voice trembled a little. He hesitated. He seemed to be having some difficulty with his throat. "I don't want to frighten you," he went on, after a moment, "but it could hardly be more serious for you."

"And for you," she breathed.

"It does n't matter about me." He seemed suddenly bitter. "I 'm only fodder for bullets, anyhow. I should n't have brought you."

"But I asked you to bring me."

"That makes no difference. You 're a girl. That situation was up to me. Absolutely."

She bridled at this. Was there a man anywhere in this masculine world who could perceive woman as responsible, independent human material?

"Please," she said gently, "if there 's any fault or blame it is half mine. I 'll take my share."

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There was unconscious force behind her girlish softness. A sudden deeper admiration shone out of his blue eyes, and his hands rested more lightly on her shoulders. His touch was caressing. Slowly the hands slid down her arms, hesitated at her wrists, then descended on her hands, removed them gently from the curled-up dog, and clasped them. She held her breath. Her head sank back against the cushions.

"The situation is about this," he was saying. "We're thirty or forty miles from Peking, and forty or fifty from Tientsin. Whatever we do, however we get out of here, it's a matter of footwork or a cart, if there's such a thing to be had. I wouldn't dare try to get you back to Peking now. And it'll take a couple of days, at the best, to make Tientsin. All this, if we can get on at all. Right now we're under fire, and for all we know we may find ourselves any minute in the middle of a battle. It's as serious as that."

Her confused mind was beginning to clear. Her hands returned his pressure.

"It's all right," she said. "It isn't your fault, nor mine. We'll simply make the best of it. Either we get out or we don't, that's all."

She gently withdrew one hand. It was a compromise that, at the moment, seemed reasonable. He took the hand that she left to him in both of his; bent over and kissed the fingers, one by one; deliberately unbuttoned her glove and drew it off; then kissed the bare fingers and the back of her hand. Edith was leaning

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back with half-closed eyes, smiling a little smile that he could not see in the dim light.

"I 'm going to tell you something," he said, a little later. "There 's no use of our pretending that this is n't a very remarkable experience."

She stirred, but said nothing.

"It *is*, you know. I don't believe a man and a girl ever had a more remarkable one."

The way he pronounced the word "man" recalled to her with an odd little thrill what a boy he was. He went on.

"And I don't want you to think I don't appreciate it. It 's a big thing — an awful big thing. It 's wonderful. It looks as if Fate had just made up its mind to pick up us two and throw us together."

"I know," she breathed. "And I don't even know your name."

At this they both laughed.

"Is n't that just it!" he cried. "That shows how much names and positions and all really matter. Now listen. Here 's what I was going to tell you. My name — my military name — is Sanders, Harry Sanders. That 's the name I enlisted under. The boys in the Company call me Curly Sanders. My story is a very strange one. Perhaps you 've noticed that I don't talk quite the same as some private soldiers — my use of English, I mean. Though, after all, there 's all kinds in the service. But I was brought up to something different. My father is a very rich man — a multi-millionaire."

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"It does n't seem to matter," said she, "the way I feel to-night, who your father is — or who you are."

"I know," said he. "It 's just you and me — the man and the woman. That, I suppose, is what love is. Real love, I mean. The big thing."

They were silent for a time. Then he resumed his story.

"Last year my father made up his mind that I had to go into his business — at the bottom and work up. When I objected, he cut me off — would n't give me a cent. I tried to get along by myself for awhile. But it 's hard, you know, earning a living, when your parents have n't given you the right kind of a training to start with. One day I saw a recruiting station of the U. S. Marines. In a park. It struck me that I was young — only twenty-two. It looked like a good chance to travel around a bit and see the world in a pretty interesting way. Certainly it was a heap better than the job I had in a shoe-store."

"Oh," she murmured, "you did that?"

"Yes. And sold tips to newspapers — and drove a taxi — and tried the express-business as a teamster, and strikebreaking — all sorts of things."

"It was plucky of you."

"Oh, no. Any fellow would have done it. Anyhow, I knew it would be a shock to the Governor and it would n't hurt me, so I enlisted. I 'm glad I did. It brought me out to China and to you. . . . It is all queer and strange. But I 'm going to say this —

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now, before anything more serious happens to us. We *are n't* responsible for this. It just happened. Here we are. There 's no sense pretending we have n't got something for each other. My job now is to get you out of here and safe to Tientsin. I 'm going to do it, if I can. If not, if I fail at it — well, I love you, that 's all. It has come to me, the big experience. And I 'm going to give you this. Whatever happens, you must keep it always." He took from his little finger a heavy seal ring and placed it on the third finger of her left hand.

Edith said nothing. For a long moment she sat looking down at the ring and turning it slowly round and round her finger.

" It is — strange," she murmured.

He nodded. He took her two hands and pressed his warm lips against them, one after the other. He released them, slipped his arms about her shoulders and drew her closer to him. She made an effort to hold herself back.

" Edith," he whispered, close to her ear.

Had she told him her name was Edith? She was trying to think. Strange vague forces, newly released within her, seemed to be swarming over her mind and undermining her will.

" Not now," she was breathing — " not yet — " She managed to wrench herself free. Wing, disturbed, set up a barking that for the moment drew their attention.

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"You have n't — one — for me?" he was pleading.

She was fighting desperately to collect her faculties.

"Not one — Edith?"

"Wait," she managed to say. "It is — we don't know yet that it is love. It could n't come as quickly as this." She felt that he was smiling. "Well then, if it could — how can we be sure?"

"Are n't you sure?" he asked, reproachfully.

"No — I 'm not. I 'm not. It 's been such a whirl. And it has all been so — so romantic."

"Perfect!" said he.

"Perhaps —" she was looking at him with a sudden steadiness that surprised herself —"perhaps I don't love you at all. Perhaps it is just the thrill of all that has happened — our being together this way — and you *are* nice."

"Are you sorry you took the ring, Edith?"

"Why"— she hesitated —"no. I simply can't tell anything about it. I just don't know. Can't you understand?"

He shook his head. "You puzzle me."

She hesitated. He again reached forward and took her in his arms, firmly this time. He held her head up close to his, in the hollow of his arm. His eyes were gazing into hers. His lips were hovering close to hers. But she roused, wrenched herself partly free, and buried her face on his shoulder.

"Oh — please!" she whispered.

"Not one?"

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"I'm sorry," she said. "I really don't mean to be cross."

"Well — on the forehead — just one —"

He raised her head. She feared he was going to kiss her lips, and started to dodge away; but he held her face firmly between his hands and brushed his lips gently against her forehead. Then he released her. She sank back again the cushions with pounding temples, and covered her face with her hands.

He leaned forward. "Do you regret it, dear?"

She lowered her hands and for a moment looked at him. Suddenly her eyes filled with tears. She rested a light hand on his arm.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I really don't mean to be cross. You're saving my life, and —"

"Haven't saved it yet," he interrupted grimly.

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"No, but — How quiet it is! I don't believe they 're shooting now."

They were silent, listening.

She deposited Wing on the seat, got to her knees, and looked out over the road ahead. Faint, far away, there was a new noise in the night, a coughing sound. "Come up here!" she commanded.

They stood side by side in the car. She was drawing on the glove he had removed. After a moment they sought each other's eyes. "It 's an engine," she cried, "a train! They 've been stopped by the fighting. Oh, do you think we can get to it!" And she opened the door and stepped to the ground.

He stood motionless, looking after her rather ruefully. Then slowly, very slowly, he put on his equipment and followed.

"I 'm almost sorry," he said.

She tapped the dusty road with a neatly shod toe. "We must hurry."

"I 'm sorry, sort of. It smashes our dream."

"You don't want me to be killed," said she.

The situation had slipped out of his grasp. Her mood had changed.

"Of course not. But, oh, Edith —"

He tried to take her in his arms; but she had no difficulty in eluding him, hampered as he was with his blanket-roll and rifle, and her satchel.

"Don't — please!" she said. "You 'll hurt Wing."

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His expression of exasperation was lost in the darkness.

She started off along the road. There was nothing for it but to catch up with her and take her arm. She walked easily and rapidly. He looked down admiringly at her swinging step.

"I know who you are," she broke out unexpectedly, after they had walked a little way in silence. "You 're Charlie Snyder, of Middletown."

The hand that held her arm moved with a sudden start.

"Yes," he said. "I told you the truth. My father *is* rich. I 'm a rich man myself. I ran away to enlist. I 'm Charlie Snyder, of Middletown."

Edith was in a brown study. "I know your sister, Betsy," she went on. "We were at school together." She stopped short. She knew other things. The escapades of Charlie Snyder were still a matter of gossip, even in the neighboring city in which she lived. This very matter of his enlistment had filled the local papers for just one blazing day before old William H. Snyder could make his influence felt. It was a chorus-girl story — and not of one chorus girl, but two! Broadway had made short work of Charlie Snyder.

She disengaged her arm, and went on unsupported, holding Wing against her breast and swinging her shopping-bag. Her lips were compressed. The same shadow of night that hid the queer baffled expression

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on his face happily concealed the flush that came and went on hers — that came and went with certain troubled thoughts.

They walked through another small village whose inhabitants of every age were out on the road in excited groups. They passed out between the last two houses and saw, a quarter of a mile away across the fields, a long train of passenger-cars. Farther along, by the light of a row of bonfires, a swarm of men were working on the track. Most of the passengers appeared to be out, standing in dark little knots or moving slowly to and fro in the firelight.

Edith and her soldier turned off from the road and stumbled across a field of stubble. They came to a sunken road. He lowered her into it, and lifted her out on the farther side. They picked their way among a score of earthen mounds, with joss papers fluttering from the top of each, that she knew for ancestral graves.

There was a small farmhouse in a walled compound by the railroad. In the shadow of the wall, they paused.

"It 's hard to let you go like this," he said. She felt that he was trying to force a note of sentiment into his voice. But the effort was not wholly successful. There had been magic between them this night, a magic that had gone as a bubble goes.

"Thank you," she said gently. "You got me here."

He tried to press closer, but she held him off. "I 'll

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write," he whispered. "Will you be at the Astor House in Tientsin?"

She shook her head. "You must n't write."

"But — you 're not stopping it like this —"

She nodded. "We must. It was a mistake."

"A mistake!" he repeated bitterly, almost angrily. "Then it *was* what you said — just the romance, not me."

"Don't," she murmured. "Please, let me go!"

He released her hand; and she slipped unobtrusively out by the train, among the shadows and the moving groups of men, women and children passengers and the curious, crowding Chinese. She stood quietly there, a slim pretty girl in a tailored suit, turban, and white gloves, carrying in one hand an umbrella and a small satchel, and holding a tiny Pekingese dog that stirred in her arm and licked her face.

And standing there, she heard an officer call sharply: "Here, Sanders, what are you doing back here! Get forward there on the track work, and be quick about it."

She pressed her hand to her eyes. How confusing it was. What a night! That officer was an acquaintance of hers. She turned away, unwilling to trust herself to speak to him.

Then she remembered that Charlie Snyder's ring was still on her finger. She wrenched it off. He was coming. He would have to pass her. It would hardly do for her to hand it to him — before all these people. She dropped it on the ground, and looked at

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him. His eyes followed the movement. But instead of picking it up, he kicked it contemptuously aside, strode by with stiff, military manner, and went on until she lost him in the shifting crowd. At the sight a

"Your Aunt and I *have* worried about you."

little, a very little, of the magic that had woven its web about her heart and senses not an hour earlier fluttered back. It was an act of bravado; but she liked him for it. It was a better ending than the

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other. She looked on the ground for the ring. But over the spot where it had lain was the firmly planted foot of a bland, moon-faced Chinaman. She gave a little shrug. That, too, was better. And she turned her eyes to the train.

What she saw there made her pulse jump. At an open window not five yards away was the white face of her aunt, and behind it, peering over her shoulder, the rather fat, business-worn face of her uncle, Mr. Wilberly.

"For goodness' sake, Edith!" cried Mrs. Wilberly. "Where have you been, child?"

Miss Austin, as she nodded and smiled and then moved toward the steps at the end of the car, found herself doing some rapid thinking. "How on earth shall I explain it to them?" she was saying to herself. "How much shall I tell. I've got to say something. People don't pop up in the middle of the night from nowhere — not so often, and not in the heart of China." But her wits were too confused to settle this little problem. She found herself getting on the train and making her way along the side corridor to the compartment in which her aunt was reclining.

"How on earth —" began that lady again.

"I felt sure you were somewhere on the train," her uncle interrupted, with an apologetic expression. "I tried to look through for you, but it was so crowded —"

"Frank, you *told* me you *had* looked through," cried Mrs. Wilberly, reproachfully.

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"Well, my dear, I did. I went everywhere it was humanly possible to go. You've no idea how it is. I tell you there are two hundred men traveling on the roof. It's clear enough now that she *was* on the train, is n't it?" And the uncle added, with assumed cheerfulness, "It's a lucky thing you stepped out here, Edith, and we happened to see you. Your aunt and I *have* worried about you."

Miss Austin smiled, and said nothing.

A little later, a fellow passenger stopped at the door of the compartment to inform them that the track was repaired and the line reported clear to Tientsin. "We'll be off in two minutes," he said. Then the locomotive whistled, and there was the sound of men clambering to the roof of the car and moving about up there, as the Chinese passengers and the military escort prepared to continue the journey at that precarious altitude.

On the following evening, Miss Austin, in a pale yellow evening gown with a flat gold ribbon bound about her fluffy hair, met her aunt in the hall of the Astor House at Tientsin and went in with her to dinner. Mrs. Wilberly, refreshed after a long sleep in a comfortable hotel, covertly watched her niece as she seated herself at the table and picked up the elaborate menu-card. She was thinking that Miss Edith Austin was an unusually beautiful girl. It was curious that she did not take more kindly to the men. At times she even seemed to avoid them. She ap-

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parently preferred going about by herself. A regular little Miss Independent, she was.

"The same old thing," said Edith pleasantly, running her eye down the long card. "It looks like a real French dinner. But it is n't. Do you know, Aunt, that 's one reason I 'll be glad to get out of China — just to eat a real meal, where there is n't always something the matter with the green vegetables, and the butter does n't come in a can from Australia and the milk in a can from home. I 'd give anything just to have things taste right again. Oh, by the way, where 's Uncle?"

"I meant to tell you," replied Mrs. Wilberly, "he 's invited company to dine with us. Did you ever hear of Charlie Snyder, of Middletown?"

Edith sat perfectly still; but her slim body had become suddenly rigid, and her fingers pressed so tightly against the menu-card in her hands that the tips, usually a healthy pink, went white. She could not speak; so she nodded.

"Well, it 's he. A queer, romantic story. He enlisted, you know — in the Marines. He 'd got into some trouble. His father decided to leave him in for a year, to get the discipline. Then he had Senator Mangelburg arrange with the Department to get him out. Your uncle says that he 's really a nice boy, and it 's done him a world of good — quite made a man of him."

Edith's eyes were fixed on the pedestal of the flower-vase that stood in the center of the table. Her head

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was swimming. She heard steps behind her, and Mr. Wilberly's voice. She saw her aunt smiling and preparing to rise, and knew that she must rise too. She did rise. She stood motionless for a second, fighting down the confused tumult in her mind. Then she turned.

There stood her stout uncle. And beside him was a tall, broad-shouldered young man of twenty-four or five, with straight black hair, heavy eyebrows, black eyes, and with a noticeably long, "strong" chin. He wore a dinner-coat. She felt that she was turning pale; and steadied herself by resting the knuckles of one clenched hand on the table.

Then they sat down.

Fortunately for Edith, who could not possibly have framed a five-word sentence, the real Charlie Snyder was fully as talkative as his blond counterfeit had been. And Mr. Wilberly was plying him with questions about his extraordinary experience as a private in the Marines.

"It 's been rather hard luck," said the young man — this was later, over the Parisian coffee and the Manila cigars —"that they let me out when they did last week. I 'd like to have stayed in for the Revolution. But once the orders came to strike my name off the roll and hand me my discharge, I had to go. I was n't a soldier any more."

He turned to Edith. "You might think it a rough life, Miss Austin. But it 's astonishingly interesting. There are all kinds of men in the service, you know.

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She felt that she was turning pale.

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And it does one good to knock around with them. You 'd be astonished to know how much one really learns about life just being close to those boys."

"Yes," murmured Edith, a shade drily, "I suppose I would."

"And everything considered, they 're nice boys. Good fellows. They have their faults of course. Kipling hit it, with his 'Absent-Minded Beggar' thing. They 're a harum-scarum lot. Some of 'em drink a bit too much. And some have adventures that I would n't exactly repeat to you here. But taken by and large, they 're real. They 've taught me a lot. Why, take Curly Sanders alone. My life — the rest of it — would be a lot poorer if I 'd never known Curly Sanders. I 'm simply dippy about Curly."

Miss Austin's hands were clasped tightly in her lap, under the table. Her face was expressionless.

"Curly, you see, is really a gifted person," ran on the talkative young man. "He 's one of that rare sort that actually live in a world of make-believe. It is n't his fault. He 's a walking Arabian Nights. He can't cross the street without running bang into the most extraordinary adventure. Real ones, you know. They happen to him. Mostly with ladies. He is — forgive me, Mrs. Wilberly, but he is — simply one wonder with the ladies. Rich and poor, high and low, they 're all alike to Curly.

"And the joy of it is, he always comes right back and tells us all about it. Of course, you can never be sure how much of what he tells is so. But he 's

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always specific as to names and places and dates. And it's always gorgeous. Why, he must be down here now — it was our Company that came with your train. K Company went up day before yesterday in their place. Come to think of it, Miss Austin, Curly is from your town. His father's a grocer. Curly went to high-school there. Then he had to drive a grocery-wagon. Then he worked in — oh, Williams's drug store, a soda water clerk. Then he skipped out to New York, had some hard luck, and enlisted.

"I must certainly look Curly up to-morrow. It's absolutely sure that he's had some hair-raising adventure in this mix-up. And he'll begin telling me all about it as soon as he sees me."

More was said, but it passed by Miss Austin's ears unheard. She could only smile and nod mechanically now and then to give an appearance of being in the talk.

But gradually as she sat there her brain began to clear. Her independent spirit slowly reasserted itself. She wondered if —

"How long are you staying here, Mr. Snyder?" she asked, as she found herself leaving the dining-room by his side.

"Only to-morrow. I'm leaving for Shanghai on the night boat."

"Oh, really." Her big eyes turned to his. They were beautiful eyes. And she added, quite deliberately, "I'm sorry we shan't see something of you. Betsey has told me so much about you."

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She saw the light come into his own black eyes.

"Well," said he —"there *is* to-morrow. Could n't we — well, play around together a bit?"

"I have nothing to do," said she.

"Just consider yourself engaged for the day then." His manner was positively enthusiastic. "Do you know, seeing you here just wipes China out. It wipes the Marines out. It 's like home."

She smiled. "I 'd love to knock around and see the city. I don't get much chance with Uncle and Aunt. But I don't want to keep you from your friend Curly and his new story."

"Oh, hang Curly!" cried Charlie Snyder boyishly. And they both laughed.

"It won't be necessary to hang him."

"We 'll forget him, then."

"All right," said Miss Austin, quite steadily, "we 'll forget him."

As soon as they were outside, in the semi-darkness of the big porch, she gave way to the impulse to draw a long, a very long, breath.

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IV

WANDA OF THE MYSTERIES

IT was Sunday afternoon at Tientsin. In the little park that is the most perfectly British thing in the British Concession a Sikh band of fifty pieces was playing "The Stars and Stripes Forever." Tourists strolled about the gravel paths. Japanese, Hindoo, and Chinese *amahs* placidly wheeled the perambulators of ruddy British babies. Outside, on the corner, a yellow Shantung policeman, baton under arm, languidly watched the carriages and rickshaws roll by.

Within the park, on a bench that was set far back among the shrubbery, sat Edith Austin with a red portfolio on her knee, writing a letter with a fountain-pen. Beside her a tiny Pekingese dog, black with one white ear, was curled in slumber. Tucked away inside the portfolio was a bag of American chocolates, into which Miss Austin's left hand made occasional little forays. Her slim figure was comfortably relaxed; but her pretty mouth twisted itself unconsciously with the strokes of the pen, her brows gathered every now and then into a v-wrinkle just above the straight, rather long nose, and her usually demure hazel eyes were deep with the immense seriousness of

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a philosophy based on more than twenty years of living.

I realize now, Harriet dear, that I can never, *never* again be the simple, ignorant child I was up to this year. Life has been *particularly* hard for me, I think. Even with Mother I have to be careful what I say. She 's a dear, but she is n't *modern*. She just is n't.

And Aunt and Uncle — now you know, how perfectly bully it was of them to bring me on this glorious journey to the Orient. You 're right — I owe them *everything* for that.

Miss Austin had been hazily conscious, while she was writing, of some unusual disturbance on the grass plot at her right, where, a few moments earlier, three little Britons had been playing a game with jackknives. Now she looked over there and with an effort collected her faculties.

A young girl of about her own age — a remarkably small and remarkably pretty girl whom she had seen of late about the hotel — came running out from the bushes, closely pursued by a sinister little band of Chinese coolies. Her hat had been nearly torn off and one sleeve of her bodice was in shreds. She was deathly pale, and was panting for breath.

As Edith's startled eyes were taking in the extraordinary scene, a good-looking young American hurried to the rescue. But two of the Chinese held the girl, and the others turned on the American and bore him to the ground, beating him savagely.

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Edith wondered if it was a dream. The band, she knew, was still playing; it was "Sweetheart, I love thee only," now, from "The Chocolate Soldier."

The American lay still — there on the ground. They were leaving him, and were dragging the girl away. Edith sprang up, dropping the portfolio, and ran after them. "Don't do that!" she found herself shouting. "Help her! Help her!"

A few steps carried her past a group of trees and shrubs, and there, out of view from her bench, was a large camera on a tripod, and a young fellow beside it smoking a cigarette and turning a crank. By him stood a thin man with a derby hat on the back of his head, grayish hair and big horn spectacles. He was smoking a cigar. And crowding in a semi-circle behind these two was a respectful little gathering of tourists, *amahs*, children, and Chinese.

Edith stopped short. She looked at the struggling group. The face of the pretty girl was thickly painted. For a moment Edith was too confused to move. She felt the red coming into her cheeks.

Then the man with the horn spectacles took his cigar from his mouth and waved it. The camera-operator stopped turning the crank. The man on the ground got up and brushed off his clothes. He was painted too. The girl smiled — even through the thick grease-paint her smile was radiant — and nodded toward Miss Austin. "Thanks just as much," she called out in a musical voice.

Slowly Miss Austin returned to her bench, gathered

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up the belongings that had scattered out of her portfolio, and tried to resume the thread of her letter. But for all of half an hour she could only munch chocolates and listen to the band. Gradually, however, her composure returned. After a time she even indulged in a faint smile, and gave Wing, the dog, a friendly little pat. Then she wrote on: —

. . . I owe them everything for that. But they could never in the world understand our views, yours and mine. I would n't dare tell them. I think it would *kill* them.

But I was going to say — You remember the talks we used to have — back before either of us knew the world *at all* — when we were first reading Candida and Woman and Economics — and we used to wonder how it would seem to really escape from our *dreadful* suburban seclusion and see a bit of this great man's world for ourselves.

Well, I *have* seen a bit of it!

I 've seen — don't ever whisper a word, dear! — a prize-fight in a Shanghai opium-den. I was second to one of the fighters. I helped him take off his shirt. And oh, Harriet, it was wonderful! You 've no idea — the thrill, the *humanness* of it!

And I 've been in a revolt — at Peking — with bombs and looting Manchus and a revolver in my own hand that I almost used — and against a *white man!* I would have used it, too, if I had n't been rescued — you could n't guess — by a girl-gambler!

And I 've been made love to. By a perfect dear of a boy. Sometime when I 'm sure of my sense of humor

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I 'll tell you about that. The queer thing was that for about twenty minutes I really wanted to fall in love. Can you believe it? I *wanted* to. Me!

Then I got sensible all at once. It slipped by like a sneeze that won't come. And after that I was n't even *interested*. You are n't much interested in sneezes afterward, you know.

Miss Austin lingered a moment over this sentence with a pleased smile; then continued: —

I 'm almost sorry. It 's rather saddening to learn that you 're not the falling-in-love kind. But I suppose it 's safer.

Aunt does n't dream. Nor Uncle. They think I 'm just the green little thing I look like.

Well, Harriet dearest, I 've learned one thing that is *invaluable*.

We were right. A girl *can* go anywhere alone — even here on the China coast. All they used to try to make us believe, that life is full of mysterious hidden dangers, that people are such dreadfully complicated things, is just plain bunk. I 'll admit that I 've been afraid once or twice out here, but that was *because* I was ignorant. I was always looking for something terrible beyond words to happen. It never did. I can see now that it never will. Why, I have n't even been insulted but once. After this I 'm not going to be afraid of anything.

Really, Harriet, there 's no particular mystery about life. People are simple . . .

A shadow fell across the paper. She raised her eyes, and found the moving-picture heroine standing before her.

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This girl was hardly above five feet tall, and weighed little more than ninety pounds. Even as she stood quietly there, her lithe young body seemed to respond uncontrollably to the swinging rhythm of the band; by some subtle physical suggestion she appeared from second to second on the point of breaking into a bewildering succession of bendings and posings. "She's the gracefullest thing I ever *saw*," said Edith to herself. Her skin was fair and fresh; her hair, under the big shade-hat, was really golden; her facile mouth was quivering on the brink of a smile; her eyes were large, blue, and liquid.

"Mind if I sit down with you?" asked the girl.

Edith was conscious of a thrill of pleasure. This adorable little creature, who looked like a child, was really a grown-up actress. She earned her living, independently, in a world of men. She came and went as she chose. She had certainly traveled far; she had doubtless experienced much. Yet there was not a wrinkle in the fair skin, and the blue eyes were as candid as a baby's. "I'm right," thought Edith, as she made room on the bench; "she's as simple and sweet as if they'd kept her in a convent."

"I noticed your dog," said the girl, in a pleasantly casual tone; "and then I liked your looks."

"That was silly of me — running over there —" began Edith.

The girl waved the remark carelessly aside. "Oh, *that*," she said,—"we get used to that. You're at

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the Astor House too, are n't you?" An ingenuous person, clearly. She chattered along as easily as a child of ten. "I don't know your name."

Edith told her.

"Mine 's Connidge — my stage-name, that is. I 'm from Bridgeport, Connecticut. You see — 'idge' from my city, 'conn' from my state. I think it 's nice to be patriotic where we can. Don't you? Your first name 's Edith, you say? I 'm going to call you that, if you don't mind. I always get mixed on last names."

"I don't mind at all," replied Edith, conscious that she was being swept along rather rapidly.

"My first name 's Wanda. You *are* stopping at the Astor House, are n't you?"

As Wanda put the question she turned and looked back through the shrubbery toward the big hotel across the street. Built for comfort during the long summers, the front wall of the structure was set back behind a tier of broad verandas or galleries that extended the full width of the building and on around the corner. The outside room on each floor opened on the gallery by shuttered doors, long rows of them. Thus it was possible, by using the galleries and the outside stairways connecting them (these latter were around the corner on the end of the building) to go from any one outside room to any other without entering the interior corridors of the building.

"That 's my room," said Edith, "on the third floor, second from the corner — near where that man is

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walking up and down, the one with the little black moustache."

Wanda's eyelids drooped for a moment, as if her thoughts had strayed afield. Then, in an impenetrably casual tone, she asked: "Do you know that man?"

Edith did not. "Oh, I've seen him around. And he's tried to flirt with me."

Wanda's face assumed a sympathetic expression. "He would do that," she murmured. "He's a bad actor, if you want my opinion. But then —" she gave a little sigh,—"most of 'em are. And he *has* nice eyes. He's the tenor of that English concert-company that's doing the Coast — the 'Purple Mysteries.' You know."

Edith said she had seen the advertisements.

"They're a phony bunch. The press is that they're big London people that can't afford to have their names known. They play in purple costumes and purple silk masks. We've been running into 'em all along — at Yokohama, Kobe, Nagasaki, Shanghai."

The conversation flagged for a little while. The two girls watched the passers-by. Edith remarked occasionally on the music. Wanda invariably replied by a bit of shrewd comment on the appearance of some man that happened to be within view. A note of melancholy crept into the voice of the little actress.

"Oh, my dear," she observed later, "if you knew what I've had to endure from men. A girl is so helpless."

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Edith looked at her, and was surprised to see that the corners of her mouth were sagging wearily and that there were tears in her eyes. She wondered what disturbing memory had so suddenly depressed that volatile spirit. It seemed hardly possible that there could be any strain of sadness in the life of so lovely and youthful a person.

Wanda slowly turned her head and met Edith's troubled gaze. She brushed a tear from her cheek.

"You 'll think I 'm a fool," she murmured.

Edith shook her head. "Indeed I won't," she replied impulsively. "I wish you would tell me what is the matter." And she rested a gentle hand on the girl's sleeve.

Wanda mused. "I wonder if I *could* tell you."

"Please. Were you reminded of something sad?"

Wanda smiled mournfully. "I never forget it," she replied. "Only you have to keep up most of the time. I guess that 's what makes life so hard. 'Laugh and the world laughs with you,' you know." She fell to musing again. "Tell me, Edith," she remarked, after a moment, "do you think there 's such a thing in the world as true friendship?"

"I 'm *sure* there is!" cried Edith. "Won't you tell me? Perhaps I could help."

Wanda shrugged her shoulders. "It 's beyond that. Nobody could help me now." Her pathetic eyes again sought Edith's girlish face. "I don't know what on earth to do. You 're a dear girl, Edith, but I don't

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believe you 've had enough experience of life to understand."

"I 've seen a good deal," said Edith.

There was so much quiet assurance in her tone that Wanda flashed at her a glance of surprise and inquiry; then dropped her eyes and remarked:

"You see, dear, I was married two years ago."

"Married!"

The exclamation slipped by Edith's guarding lips. Then, in fear that she had betrayed some inexperience, she hurried on: "You surprised me. You seem so young and inexperienced yourself."

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" murmured Wanda. "If you knew all I 've suffered. I — I had to leave 'im. He 's a drunkard. And he beat me."

"Beat you!"

"With a razor-strop. I could show you — there 's marks on my back now. He got to bringing other women right into our apartment — made me wait on them. He was — Oh, I can't! You would n't understand! He made me work all the time, rehearsing and playing, and then took my salary away from me — every cent. Not even carfare for me, and I get two hundred a week in New York. Edith, dear, if you knew what men are, and what we women have to endure from 'em!"

"I know a little about men," said Edith grimly.

"Well, twice I tried to kill myself. Once by gas. He came home sober that night, for once, and kicked the door in, and beat me till I fainted. The other

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time I was just jumping out the window when he caught me — by my nightgown. Just see what he 's brought me to."

She opened her hand purse; and there, nestling among three diamond rings and a diamond pendant, a box of lip carmine and a diminutive powder puff, a crumpled-up handkerchief, some tightly folded bits of paper, cablegrams apparently, a Mexican dollar (value fifty cents) with red paper inscribed in Chinese characters pasted on one side of it, and a little silver change, was a small, rough glass bottle, marked " Poison."

The pupils of Edith's eyes contracted, and her lips pressed together. But true to her new standing as a woman of experience, she suppressed the exclamation of horror that was struggling to her lips.

" I ran away from 'im and went to Chicago. I had a dreadful time — no money at all. There was men who would have advanced me some, but of course I could n't take it — not that way."

" Of course not," murmured Edith.

" And as I could n't very well go to any other manager until I was free from Will — you see he had always been my manager; Will M. Ryan of the Ryan Amusement Co.— there literly was n't any way I could turn. One week I almost starved. Will sent horrid telegrams. He hired detectives to shadow me. One of 'em told me who he was, and said that if — Oh, you 've no *idea* what I 've been through!

" Then I got a chance to come out here with this

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company and do moving-pictures. The money was n't much, of course, but there was the ocean trip, and a chance to see Japan, and I jumped at it. Just came right along, all impetyus as usual, and hopped straight out of the frying pain into the cheerfully glowing coals. That 's me, you know, all over. I don't look into things careful enough. I 'm too intense."

There was a huskiness in Edith's throat. As she looked at the delicately modeled face under the big hat, at the soft little mouth and the great childlike blue eyes, she felt that she was being permitted to witness one of life's inexplicable tragedies, that before her was quivering an innocent but tortured soul. She was conscious of a new gravity, almost a solemnity, within herself.

She managed to ask. "And so you — you 've found more trouble out here?"

Wanda pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. "It 's terrible. I don't know how I came to confide in you this way. But I 've got to talk to somebody. It 's either some kind of sympathy and help or —" her voice quivered — "or that little bottle. I 'm in a trap. I don't know what to do." And she took to clasping and unclasping her fingers in her lap.

"Try to be calm," said Edith gently. "Relax. And tell me quietly. I 'm going to help you if I can."

Wanda gave her a grateful look, and continued: "We were n't three days out from San Francisco before I found that I had to fight the director of this company."

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"You don't mean —" breathed Edith.

Wanda's eyes were brimming again. She nodded. "He was dreadful. I had to keep my stateroom door locked — until Miss La Place came in with me. You must have seen him around here — thin man, with grayish hair. Mr. Hemmingway."

"And horn spectacles."

"Yes. Always smoking a cigar."

"Why —" Edith mused — "I thought he looked very quiet and —"

"My dear," Wanda interrupted impressively, "the quiet ones are the worst. There was a tenor singer — he was really only a high baritone — with the Acorn Opera Company — he was the quiet kind that — You 've no idea! I got worn out fighting him. Sometimes I wonder what 's the use."

"But you must n't feel that way. That is weakness. You must keep up the fight — always."

"I know. But it does wear you out. Specially when you can't see anything ahead. Well, anyway, when we landed at Yokohama I found these cablegrams from Will." She took the folded papers from her purse and spread them out for Edith to read. "While we were in Japan and Shanghai I got a cable every day. Then for two weeks there was nothing. I could n't imagine what it meant. Hemmingway knew something, I 'm sure — he acted so queer. Then two days ago this came."

She laid the message on Edith's portfolio. "See, it 's from Shanghai. He came clear across the Pacific

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on a fast Empress boat. He 's half way up the Coast now — be here by Wednesday."

Edith read the message: —" Leaving here to-night for Tientsin. Am sure everything will be all right when I see you. Will."

" Are you sure he — your husband — does n't love you? " asked Edith.

Wanda compressed her lips and shook her head. " No. It is n't real love. Sometimes, when he has n't seen me for a while, I fascinate him." She turned her big, appealing eyes to Edith's. " Why is it, dear, I always seem to attract men — that wrong way? Can it be my fault? It 's so disappointing. It hurts so."

" I 'm sure it 's not your fault, Wanda. You can't help being beautiful."

Wanda looked pleased for an instant; then her eyes filled again. " The poor little thing! " thought Edith. " What a bundle of emotions she is. She 's all temperament. There ought always to be some one to take care of her. And she 's so sweet and so — so timid."

Wanda was sobbing now, very softly, and pressing her handkerchief to her nose. " Oh, it 's too dreadful to tell! " she burst out. " Here I am talking in this matter-of-fact way and — Well, that man tried to get into my room this afternoon — while I was dressing. I 'm akchully not safe there — in my own room. I ran out of the hotel. I came here because it was open and safe and there were people. And you were here. I thought maybe you 'd let me talk. I had to talk

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"Are you sure he — your husband — does n't love you?"

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to somebody. I 'm all alone — and perfickly helpless. Hemmingway is even holding back my salary, just the way Will always did. I don't know what to do. If life has got to be like this I don't want — to — live!"

Again she fell to sobbing. But after a few moments, with an obvious effort at self-control, she quieted down. Then she wiped her eyes; deftly, with a quick glance to left and right, applied the diminutive powder-puff to her nose; dropped her hands listlessly to her lap; and gazed, with eyes that seemed to be looking very far, in the direction of the bandstand, with its glitter of silver and brass, its dreamy brown faces, its enormous red turbans.

Edith, her color slightly heightened, was thinking intently, and toying absently with the silky little dog as she thought. There was a Hamburg-American coaster sailing that night. And there was Harry Purnell of the Consular staff, who had been three grades above her in the public school at home. He had been nice and attentive, during her stay here. Well, now was his chance to be nicer. Should she tell Wanda about the need of including Harry in her plans? No, it would be better to tell Wanda nothing. It was a situation to try the mettle of the cosmopolitan Miss Austin; she must manage it alone. Her money was all, or nearly all, in the form of travelers' checks. These must be converted into gold; but they distinctly must not be cashed at the Astor House, the only place at which she was known that was open on Sun-

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days. . . . Yes, it was quite a little situation. But a calm assurance within her, an assurance that surprised herself, brought a faith that she would be equal to whatever it might prove necessary to do. Here was her chance, perhaps, to save a life — an emotional, adorable little life, that was very near to being lost in the world.

"Don't you see," Wanda was saying, "there may be dreadful trouble when Will gets here. Suppose he found out about Hemmingway. When he's drunk you just can't talk to 'im. You can't tell what he'd do. I'm horribly afraid. There might even be — shooting."

"Listen," said Edith, with a quiet sort of determination in her voice; "I'm going to bring you right in with me — into my room. Now tell me, if you should run away, is there any place you could go?"

Wanda's face brightened. "You're awfully good, Edith. I was thinking, if I could only get to Shanghai — the Auckland Amateurs offered me a job when we were at Kobe. They'll be there next week. That would keep me going until I could make some arrangements to get back home."

"What's the fare?"

"Well," replied Wanda, more briskly, "of course that's hopeless. I haven't got three dollars Mex. It costs forty or so gold — and then there's all the extras and something for Shanghai —"

Edith interrupted her. "Now, Wanda dear, you're not to be hurt or offended at what I'm going to say.

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It 's a crisis, and you must be sensible. I 've got money enough. You can send it to me later on — any time. I could let you have a hundred dollars or more easily, without Aunt or Uncle suspecting a thing."

But Wanda made no objections. Instead, she cried again. And after a moment she asked in an unsteady voice, from behind her handkerchief: "Is that gold or Mex., dear?"

"Gold, of course. Now come, Wanda, we must n't be sitting here if I 'm to get you off to-night."

"To-night!" repeated Wanda, almost in consternation.

"To-night," smiled Edith. "And you 're to put yourself absolutely in my hands."

"But I can't get three trunks off without Hemmingway knowing."

"I can," said Edith calmly.

"But he 'll be watching. And if he misses me, he 'll watch the boat."

Edith hesitated but a moment. Then she replied: "I 'll guarantee to get you off to-night. Now come."

As they entered the hotel, Edith observed the tenor with the black moustache sitting alone on the porch over a half-consumed whisky and Tan San. His face was flushed, his eyes were roving and, she thought, a bit wild. He glanced furtively at them. Edith felt Wanda tremble and draw close to her, and she hurried her into the building and up the stairs.

Edith called a boy and sent a hurriedly written chit to Harry Purnell at the Consulate. She and Wanda

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speedily packed the three trunks, then slipped down the corridor to Edith's room. There Wanda was attired in a negligé of Edith's and left to rest on the couch.

Edith next wandered down to the lounge on the main floor, and, with a large volume of "Views of Tientsin" on her knee, sat where she could command the porch and front steps through a window and the main hall through a wide door.

The tenor saw her, and hastily gulping a fresh whisky and Tan San, sauntered with an assumption of carelessness to the door and stared in at her. He wore a soft straw hat pulled down on the side of his head, and carried a light bamboo stick. She watched him, over her book. After a moment he sauntered away and ascended the stairs, cutting vicious circles in the air with his cane.

"He's a vain brute," thought Edith. "And it's just about certain that he wants to annoy Wanda." She deliberately laid down her book and followed.

Sure enough, he was hovering outside the door of the room Wanda had occupied. At sight of Edith he flushed to an even deeper red, and hurried out to the gallery by the door at the end of the corridor.

Edith returned to the lounge, and resumed her chair and book. A little time passed. Then the thin figure and the horn spectacles for which she was watching appeared in the hall. She could n't help thinking that the director person looked rather nice. He was the last man she would have picked for a monster. He

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The tenor sauntered to the door and stared in at her.

had strong lines in his face; and a patient expression about the eyes. "So goes life," she thought. "To me that tenor is a horrid thing; but Wanda thinks he has nice eyes. Wanda *knows* this manager is a brute; and here I'm thinking I might like him."

Mr. Hemmingway moved slowly out to the porch and for a long time stood there looking out at the street and the little park beyond it. He pushed his hat far back on his head, lighted a cigar, thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets, and placidly studied the treetops. Edith, her heart beating a shade faster than normal, watched him over her book. Was he going

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to spend the rest of the day there? He moved toward a comfortable wicker arm-chair. Edith's heart sank.

Mr. Wilberly, Edith's fat uncle, stepped out of a rickshaw, came laboriously up the steps, and stopped to get his breath and to borrow a light from the moving-picture director.

"Nice day," she heard her uncle say.

"Beautiful," replied Mr. Hemmingway. His voice, like his appearance, was quiet and pleasing.

"He's a vain brute," thought Edith.

Edith grew inwardly indignant as she thought of forlorn little Wanda upstairs and of the subtle perfidy of man.

"Off for a stroll?" inquired Mr. Wilberly.

"No, I'm having tea at the Consul General's."

Mr. Hemmingway sipping tea at the American Consulate, while young Mr. Purnell, of the American Con-

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sulate, was slipping out to aid in outwitting him — here was an amusing situation. The thought of it brought a momentary smile to Edith's pretty face.

Mr. Wilberly disappeared within the building.

Very deliberately Mr. Hemmingway descended the steps, called a rickshaw, and rode away. Edith stepped out on the porch and followed the vehicle with her eyes until it disappeared. Then she found the Chinese head porter, slipped a key and a gold sovereign into his impassive hand, and gave him certain very positive instructions in her best Pidgin English. Five minutes later, standing near the side entrance, she had the pleasure of seeing three trunks carried out and wheeled away. On the two ends of each trunk, where the words "Wanda Connidge, New York," had appeared, there was now a row of Astor House labels, pasted symmetrically side by side.

So much accomplished, Edith crossed to the park. There, walking to and fro in a secluded corner, she found Harry Purnell. He had grown rather good-looking since their schooldays; and his manner, a business-like briskness tempered by a whimsical, sometimes facetious, humor, was not unpleasing, she thought. He wore nose glasses, and carried a heavy cane. He was humming, in a light tenor voice.

"Very mysterious," he said, as they shook hands,— "very mysterious."

"It had to be, Harry. You 've got to help me smuggle a poor girl off on the Shanghai boat to-night, and you 're not to ask any questions."

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"Discretion is my middle name," smiled Harry. "Can do. But you very nearly did n't find me in. And if you ever doubt yourself as a charmer, Edith, it may help some to know that I 'm breaking a previous engagement with a particularly attractive person for this very evening."

"That was good of you, Harry."

"No — just weak. Sufficiency. Let 's have your instructions. Chop — chop!"

For a little time they walked about the park, Harry listening attentively while Edith explained her needs. They walked around to the Consulate, and Edith waited on the corner while Harry slipped inside. They took a pony-victoria and drove rapidly to the wharf. Here she waited while he boarded the ship. Finally they separated, and Edith hurried back to the hotel and up to her room.

She tried the door. It was locked. There was no sound within. She tapped softly. She was glad that Wanda had locked the door; it was a wise precaution. She tapped again. Doubtless the poor child had fallen asleep. She walked to the end of the corridor and back, considering whether to waken her. She lingered a moment at the door, then knocked more loudly — with her knuckles this time. Still there was no response. She felt a bit worried; there was no telling what the child might do.

She was turning irresolutely away when the sound came to her ears of a door closing, within the room. It must have been the gallery-entrance, as the room

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had but the two doors. She heard light feet crossing the room; then the key turned, and Wanda opened to her.

The little actress had found a lacy boudoir-cap of Edith's, which, with the thick yellow braids hanging down her back almost to her knees, her high color, nervous smile, and a peculiar sparkle and glow in the expressive eyes, gave her something the appearance of an excited little fairy. For a moment Edith gazed at her in a sort of admiring dismay. Was it right to pack off this alarmingly beautiful little girl on a four-day journey, alone, and to such a destination as Shanghai? Yet, to leave her here to be quarreled over by a violent husband and an unscrupulous manager . . .

Edith took her hand and led her to the couch. "You lie down and rest," she commanded.

"I can't," said Wanda, "I get so nervous, Edith dear. The room seemed stuffy. I had to step out on the gallery for a breath of air."

"That was unwise," Edith replied. She felt very old and experienced and responsible. "There is n't much use in hiding you, you know, if you 're going to get excited and show yourself the first thing."

"I suppose that 's so," murmured the actress. "But I don't think anybody saw me. I was careful."

"You 've got to be just that," replied Edith maternally. "Until midnight you 're not to stir out of this room. I 'm not even going to risk sending dinner up. Here is a cake of chocolate; and you 'll find some tea biscuit on the closet shelf."

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Wanda seemed not at all disturbed over the prospect of missing her dinner. She merely smiled.

"Now, dear," Edith continued, "please put this money in your purse. I don't want to carry so much about with me. Two — three — five — eight — twelve — thirteen — fifteen pounds. That's about seventy-five dollars, is n't it. I figure that you 'd better have at least that much. The extras mount up, you know; and then there may be some delay at Shanghai. And here 's your ticket. Your name, for the present, is Miss Robinson."

The tears again came rushing to Wanda's eyes. She took Edith's hand in both of her own, and kissed it. "You 're very, very good to me, Edith dear," she murmured brokenly.

"Now you behave," was all Edith could manage by way of reply.

Wanda dropped the gold coins into her purse, one by one. And each coin, as it fell, clinked softly against the bottle of poison. Then she said: "You must be sure and tell me just how much you spend, dear. So I 'll know."

Edith smiled, patted the soft cheek, and left her.

She went down stairs, and out to the porch, looking about for her aunt and uncle. Just outside the door she encountered the tenor, who was hurrying around the corner of the building, his face working nervously, switching his little cane against the chairs and tables as he passed them. At sight of her he stopped short,

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stared for an instant (very rudely, she thought) then turned and hurried back around the corner.

Edith gazed after him, thoughtfully. Whatever unknown terrors might be lying in wait for lovely little Wanda at Shanghai or on the remainder of the long, hard journey home, it would certainly be a relief to get her safely out of Tientsin.

That evening, at dinner, Mr. Wilberly said unexpectedly:

"Oh, say, Edith, Hemmingway, the moving picture man, wanted me to ask if you've seen anything of his Miss Connidge in the past few hours."

For a moment Edith's pulse stopped.

"He saw her talking to you earlier in the afternoon. I told him you'd hardly know. It seems she has disappeared completely. He got a key from the management, entered her room, and found her trunks gone. Funny thing."

Just then the Chinese waiter drew Mr. Wilberly's attention to the menu; and that gentleman hunted about his waistcoat for his nose-glasses, put them on, and gave his attention undividedly to the important matter of the next course.

Edith controlled the impulse to draw a long breath. Instead she nibbled a bread stick and looked out about the big dining-room with a face that was inscrutably demure.

At one o'clock that night, except for an occasional hilarious sound from the bar-room, the big hotel was

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"Why, you — you know each other!" exclaimed Miss Austin.

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still. Lights were out in the lounge. Porch chairs were piled on porch tables. And on the corner a Chili policeman, arms folded, motionless, leaned against a tree.

Two slim figures in long raincoats, each carrying a handbag, came tiptoeing out of a room on the third floor, walked softly along the veranda, turned the corner and descended two flights of stairs. Walking more rapidly they came around the hotel into Victoria Road and headed north.

On the next corner, in the shadow of the trees, a young man awaited them. He stepped forward as they approached, and took the bags from them. But instead of moving on with them he stood motionless and peered under the big hat that crowned the smaller of the two figures.

"Oh," he said, in what was evidently genuine surprise, "how do you do!"

"Why, you — you know each other!" exclaimed Miss Austin.

But without speaking further, Harry Purnell briskly led the way up Victoria Road to a corner some two blocks above the steamer-wharf, then turned off to the bank of the very narrow, very sluggish little river that is known as the Pei Ho. The girls followed.

A sampan, manned by two native boatmen, awaited them. Harry tossed the baggage aboard, and handed the two girls in after it.

The boat drifted out into the current. Wanda curled up in the bow, silent and pensive. Harry gave

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all his attention to guiding their little craft. And Edith looked from one to the other, wondering a little.

There was no moon. A little way below them the black bulk of the ship, held out nearly in mid-channel by fenders, loomed big and mysterious. In the absurd little river and from their lowly point of observation, the small coasting steamer appeared as huge as a transatlantic liner. High above the shadowy hull lights were blazing. A belated passenger, very drunk, as is not unnatural on the Coast after midnight, was reeling up the long gangplank above the water, followed by a line of porters with baggage.

The sampan drifted down on the farther side of the ship, out of sight from the wharf. Wanda was humming a gay little tune.

They scraped softly along the plates of the hull, that towered above them like a wall. Well aft, two-thirds of the way to the stern, a rope was flapping gently. Harry caught it. A head peered out of an opening just above them. Then a rope ladder was lowered.

Harry climbed up with the bags; then returned for Wanda. The actress threw her arms around Edith's neck, and kissed her. Edith could see that her eyes were shining and that she was smiling dreamily.

As she placed a dainty foot on the lowest rung of the ladder, Wanda giggled outright in sheer delight at the romantic quality of her flight. Then Harry picked up her slight body in his arm and carried her up, disappearing with her within the ship. After a moment

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he reappeared, dropped down into the sampan, and pushed off.

They were back on firm earth before he spoke. Then he said, with some evidence of feeling: "Edith, I wonder if you know what you 've been mixing in?"

"What do you mean, Harry?"

"I wonder if you know what that girl is up to."

Edith was tired; and Harry's tone disturbed her. "I know this," she broke out almost hotly, "if I had n't helped her get away to-night she would have been in terrible trouble here. I 'm not sure that I have n't saved her life, even."

"Oh," murmured Harry, with a touch of mystification in his voice. And for a little way he walked without speaking, looking straight ahead.

When they had nearly reached the hotel, he asked: "Did you give her any money, Edith?"

"Why, yes, if you must know — I did."

"Mm," said he, noncommittally.

At the hotel steps, she turned and faced him.

"Now listen, Harry," she said; "you and Wanda Connidge have met before."

"Oh," he replied, "is her name Wanda Connidge?"

Miss Austin stamped her foot.

"Really," said he, almost cheerfully. "We *have* met before, but I did n't know her name."

"Well, how —?"

"Look here, Edith, you 've knocked about some, you 've seen a bit of life. I guess perhaps you 've got sense enough to understand."

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"What are you trying to say, Harry?"

"Well — mostly we lie to girls, you know. This is a compliment, Edith, I 'm paying you. I 'm going to tell you the truth. I met that girl on the street just this morning. Flirt-pidgin — like two infants. We took a walk. We were silly, of course — talked high and mighty, music and stuff. My engagement for to-night was with her. That 's — well, that 's all."

Edith was puzzled. "No, that is n't quite all," she said. "What made you say what you did at the landing. Did you see anything on the steamer?"

Harry prepared to beat a retreat. "It 's late, Edith. 'No can keep awake my side.' And you 're tired out. I 've told you all I know. All I *know,*" he repeated, with an odd emphasis. Then he said good-night, and left her.

After a late breakfast, on the following morning, Edith wandered into the lounge.

There, over the backs of two armchairs that stood side by side at a window, she saw the tops of two heads. The round, bald one was the head of Mr. Wilberly. The other was covered with grayish hair. She moved a little to one side and, as she expected, caught a glimpse of a horn spectacle-bow beneath it.

The two men were talking, in the off-hand manner that men affect. Edith stood by the table, behind them, and picked up a post-card that was labeled, "View on Taku Road, Tientsin."

"Speaking as a business man" — it was Mr. Wil-

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berly who was speaking thus —" I don't see how you handle these crazy actresses at all. I 'd be inclined to bring 'em up with a round turn if they tried any of their ' temperament ' on me."

" It would n't work," replied Mr. Hemmingway quietly. " It has n't worked in this case. I 've exceeded all legal bounds, as it is, trying to keep that girl here. If it was anywhere but the China Coast, where there 's precious little law at best, I could n't have done anything like what I have. But I cabled Bill Ryan that I 'd hold her until he could get here. You see, I had promised him that if he 'd bring out Elsie Baker, from our Chicago company, he could take Wanda back. Now here he is, tearing up the Yellow Sea with Miss Baker, as per agreement, and I 've got no Wanda. I 've fallen down. And I watched that boat myself last night until she sailed, at two."

" Do you know she was aboard? "

" Certainly. After they 'd cast off, the little devil waved at me from the deck. She was with that fool tenor of the ' Purple Mysteries.' He had his arm around her."

Edith's body seemed to freeze as she stood motionless there. She was staring at that " View on Taku Road, Tientsin "; and the view was upside down. The blood rushed out of her face; and then, as swiftly, rushed back until her fair skin was suffused with color.

Gradually she became conscious that Mr. Hemmingway was still speaking:

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"Rather an interesting case, by the way, for the psycho-pathologists. That girl has run away with five different men, to my own knowledge; and every one of them was a tenor singer. Even including Bill himself — he used to be a light opera tenor. It 's a mania, apparently; always a runaway, and always a tenor. Can you beat it?"

"And I've got no Wanda. I've fallen down."

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"People are queer," observed Mr. Wilberly, sententiously.

"They certainly are. People are *some* queer! I knew one other case like this — a middle-aged man who had a mania for falling in love with star actresses. No matter how beautiful she might be, she had to be an actress and a star — with her name on the billboards. . . . Well, there's two things I would certainly like to know: how she got on that boat, and who put up the money. Wilson, the Mysteries' manager, tells me that the tenor didn't have twenty cents. Why, they haven't paid salaries for five weeks. And that guy hasn't brains enough to swindle anybody. No, it was our little Wanda that got into some sympathetic spirit. I wish I knew who."

"It's probably a good thing, after all," said Mr. Wilberly sagely.

"What is?"

"That she made her getaway. If she and her tenor were here when the husband walks in there'd likely as not be trouble. I know how these cases go."

"Trouble? What kind of trouble?"

"Oh, row. Punch his face. Shoot, maybe."

The director sniffed. "Not a bit of it. Bill Ryan's the best-hearted fellow in the world. Couldn't hurt a fly."

"But the tenor. He's the crazy kind, you say —"

"Tenors don't shoot people," grunted Mr. Hemmingway.

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Edith, her head a chaos of emotions and thoughts, quietly made her way out of the room and across to the park, where, though there might be disturbing memories, there *was* air.

After dinner that evening Edith became aware that Mr. Hemmingway was trying to catch her eye. Finally he encountered her at a moment when her aunt and uncle had gone into the office to look at a new lot of painted snuff-bottles, and asked if she would step out to the porch for a moment. He was so grave and kindly in manner that she did not see how to refuse.

He led her to a corner behind a group of potted palms, and drew a paper from his pocket. He looked puzzled, she thought.

"I — I 've received a wireless from Wanda Connidge," he said. "She instructs me to pay you twenty-six pounds, four shillings and eight pence out of her salary. Here it is." He produced a heavy little canvas bag. Then he cleared his throat.

"If you don't mind my asking," he went on, pushing his hat back and running his long fingers into his hair, "is that the right amount? Is that just what she owed you?"

Edith did a little mental arithmetic, then nodded. "Yes," she said — "it is. Exactly. She has even paid for the chocolate!"

Mr. Hemmingway sighed, and made a gesture of

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despair. "That's the queerest of all," he said. "That kid has kept me guessing from the start. Last week I began to think I had her number. I knew she was a born actress. I knew she was a quick thinker, and — yes — a temperamental little liar. And yet, here she turns out to be scrupulous with money, down to the last cent. Comes pretty close to what we sometimes call honor, does n't it! . . . Well, it beats me. I guess the fact is, we don't really know anybody — ever." He smiled, rather shyly, she thought, and added: "I thought you would probably want me to consider it confidential."

She could have hugged him for that. Instead she returned his smile unflinchingly, and said: "Thank you very much, Mr. Hemmingway;" and, concealing the bag in her hand, ran lightly upstairs to her room.

The money she placed in the top drawer of her bureau. In this same drawer was her red portfolio. Smiling a little, and blushing, she drew it out, opened it, and deliberately read her unfinished letter to Harriet, read it through to the end — "Really, Harriet, there's no particular mystery about life. People are simple . . ."

Several times she read these concluding words; stood there reading them until the blush, and the smile, had slowly left her face. Then she brought Wing from his basket by the window, drew a big chair to the light, curled up in it, sitting comfortably on her foot, and very soberly wrote a letter that began as follows:

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Dear Harriet:

We've been at Tientsin quite a while now, and I must say it is nothing like so interesting as Peking. It is more like a European city, you know. There *are* shops of course, when you know where to look for them; and they have some nice things. I bought a *beautiful* Mandarin coat — an old red one. And then there is very nice raw silk lace that the Chinese girls make in the French Convent. It is astonishingly cheap. I picked up a lot of it, it goes so *wonderfully* with the piece of natural Assam silk that Aunt got at Shanghai to make me a dress out of. And I may get some Satsuma buttons — blue and tan — to go with it. What do you think? . . .

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V

BEHIND THE SCREEN

"HUMAN nature is pretty much the same the world over," observed Mr. Wilberly; then paused to clip and light a cigar that was fat, like himself. "Here 's Pao Ting Fang now"— he lowered his voice —"living here at the hotel as the principal negotiator on the Chinese side of the new government loan. He knows all there is to know about Oriental diplomacy and international finance. Big man. But look at his fingers!"

Miss Austin was examining a faded old Mandarin coat that was richly embroidered in lavender, green and gold. A Chinese merchant, one of those privileged to spread his wares in the main hall of the big Peking hotel, hovered anxiously at her elbow. It was after dinner; and the corridors were crowded with tourists, officers, and diplomats. Several members of the Six Power Group of bankers, with their families, were over by the door watching the thin old conjuror produce very small bowls of goldfish from his ample robe.

Miss Austin looked up, an expression of mild interest in her demure hazel eyes. She rarely listened

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to her uncle. His conversation, apart from the topics of business and food, was usually given to platitudes. Miss Austin did not care for platitudes.

"What about his fingers?" she asked.

"They 're all twisted up. He played third base — three years — on the Yale Varsity. That was twenty years ago. Told me just now that every week he reads the pink sporting-section in that new Shanghai paper. Says he 'd like the job of Chinese Minister at Washington just so he could see Walter Johnson pitch. I tell you, folks are pretty much alike, the world over, when all 's said and done."

"And he was one of the best infielders Yale ever had." The new speaker was Mr. Henry Carpenter, a tall man, with a lean face and thoughtful blue eyes that had a way of looking at you rather directly.

Miss Austin glanced up at him. She rather liked having Mr. Carpenter around because he was always doing considerate little things for people; but she never made much effort to talk with him. He was too old — well past thirty — the settled-down sort of bachelor that knows his place and stays in it. Her eyes strayed to the great Mandarin, who was holding a sort of informal after-dinner reception near the manager's desk.

She saw a big, squarely built, dominant figure, backed by a crowded little semicircle of some twelve or fifteen lesser Mandarins, not one of whom ranked lower than the white button and three of whom wore the coral. On the well-poised head of Pao Ting Fang

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himself was the cap of office, with wide brim turned up all around —" Like a saucepan," thought Edith — a tassel of red silk spreading over the crown, a peacock feather slanting down over his shoulder, and above the crown a big round ruby set high on a base of worked gold. His robe was of brown silk, severely plain except for the large square on his breast within which was embroidered a crane, emblem of the highest civil rank.

But if the costume was Oriental, the face, with its strong, almost ascetic outline and its quiet eyes behind round, gold-rimmed spectacles, with wide, firm mouth, nose with plenty of bone in it, and broad forehead, might have been, except for the yellowish tinge of the skin and the barely perceptible slant of the eyes, from anywhere in the world. Miss Austin knew, as she studied it, that it was the strongest and finest face in the crowded hall. " I could talk with that man," she was thinking, " and be understood."

While she looked on at the little scene, a Mr. Hansel, one of the American bankers, stepped up and shook hands with the Mandarin, then turned and spoke to his son, who was standing a little apart.

A thin, blond youth was Teddy Hansel, with jumpy nerves, and eyes a little brighter than normal. He wore a dinner jacket, gray striped waistcoat and tie, and pleated soft shirt of a rather extreme fashion. He was looking up expectantly, and holding a cigarette carelessly between brown-stained fingers, a cigarette that had his monogram stamped on the paper.

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At his father's signal, young Hansel winked at Miss Austin, and stepped forward, at the same time casually tossing his cigarette into a pile of embroidered squares by the wall. A Chinese merchant hastily beat out the spark of fire, and looked up muttering feelings that he must not speak aloud.

Miss Austin turned back to the lavender Mandarin coat, smiled a very little, and shook her head. Teddy Hansel was easily the most harum-scarum youth she had ever known. She had come to be fond of him, in a way. He had an amusing aptitude at chattering in Pidgin English; and spent money with distressing abandon. You felt that you must look out for him.

For a moment she went on examining the embroidery; then curious to know what a Chinese Mandarin of Peking and Yale could have to say to the amiably irresponsible Teddy, she followed her uncle and Mr. Carpenter, who were moving nearer to the group of dignitaries.

"After all," she heard Teddy say, with engaging enthusiasm, "there never was anybody with the class of Ty Cobb on the bases."

"I suppose not," replied the Mandarin. His voice was deep and rich; his English was perfect. "I hope that I may be permitted to see him before he — how do we say it? — slows up."

And he turned, with marked graciousness of manner, toward the Wilberlys, leaving Teddy to stare at him with a grin of frank bewilderment.

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Miss Austin found herself taking the Mandarin's knotted hand and returning his smile.

"I regret that you are not seeing China in a quieter time," he was saying. "We have much to show the intelligent tourist."

"Oh, yes, indeed," murmured Edith, "I adore China. It is perfectly fascinating."

"You find it so? I am glad." The slanting eyes smiled through the round spectacles. "I have always admired the young ladies of America. Your freedom, your self-control, your hearty outdoor life — these our girls must learn from you. That, I sometimes think, is the greatest task before us, training our Chinese women into a new philosophy of life. At present it is difficult. We are only just beginning to give them feet so that they may walk. But you are young, Miss Austin. Before you die you will see great changes in China, great changes. Good-night. Good-night, all."

He walked slowly away down the corridor, followed by his Mandarins, and disappeared behind the black-and-gold screen that closed off, for the use of himself and his entourage, the extreme southern end of the ground floor.

Edith was conscious of a deep stir of interest as she turned away. It was as she had thought, this Chinaman was a cosmopolitan gentleman. He understood. He was a man you could trust. . . . And yet, he *was* a Chinaman. His imposing establishment, off there behind the screen where he had settled after the burning of his yamen in the riots of March, was a Chinese

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establishment. Teddy maintained that there were numerous wives and concubines behind that screen. Teddy liked to talk about those wives and concubines; he seemed to think it smart. And something had been said about a beautiful daughter of His Excellency by the first wife, a dainty little person who had been glimpsed by one or two inquisitive Americans, and whom Teddy had already dubbed, "The Princess."

Miss Austin dismissed the puzzle from her mind, and turned toward her own group. But Mr. Wilberly was talking. And Mr. Carpenter *was* a bit old. She hesitated, then moved over toward the conjuror.

There was a crackle and flash at her elbow. It was Teddy Hansel, lighting a cigarette. She smiled, but shook her head disapprovingly.

"How many is that to-day?" she asked.

He rolled a whiff of smoke around his tongue; then, with a slow inhalation, drew it deep into his lungs, and grinned mischievously at her. She held her breath until the smoke came curling slowly from his nostrils; then shook her head again.

"You promised you 'd keep count," she said.

"Oh, maskee that, Edith!" he replied lightly. "You talk all same missionary-brother. What 's doing this evening?"

Miss Austin shrugged her pretty shoulders. He looked at her with admiring eyes. She was wearing a dinner gown of pale yellow silk with a gold band about her fluffy brown hair.

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"You 're looking great to-night, Edith," he added, in a lower tone.

She chose to ignore this remark and answer his question. "Nothing," she said. "Aunt thought she would go to bed early. And Uncle has to talk business with that Mr. Blumstein from Shanghai."

"And what 's Mr. Carpenter doing?" he asked, with a touch of unmistakable jealousy.

"I have n't the remotest idea." She turned her clear hazel eyes directly to his slightly bloodshot ones. "You 're very amusing, Teddy — sometimes."

He looked doubtful, but relieved. "Then let 's start something. Mind if I buzz around, buzz around?"

Edith did n't mind.

"What side then? Walk on the Tartar Wall? Go look-see movies? I 'm bored to death here."

"I should n't mind the movies," said Miss Austin.

"Can do! You go catchee hat and coat."

"You 'll have to give me time to change, Teddy. I can't tramp around in this gown."

"Well,— chop-chop then."

Edith never went to her room, these days, without a stir and flutter of romantic interest; for just beyond it stood the black-and-gold screen that did not quite shut off the southern end of the corridor from curious Western eyes. Standing by her own door and inclining her head close to the wall she could sometimes see Chinese soldiers of the guard lounging and soft-footed servants moving about. During the reception hours in

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the afternoons numbers of the familiar attendant Mandarins were usually grouped at the extreme end of the passage, outside what was evidently the large corner room. This, she had surmised, was the office or reception-room of His Excellency. Old women, with tiny, crippled feet, frequently hobbled about.

Teddy Hansel's room was next to her own, one remove further from the screen. Her aunt and uncle were lodged across the corridor.

Edith paused at her door and looked around the screen. Evidently the great Mandarin and his attendants had retired for the evening. The soldiers and the serving-women were not in evidence. At first she thought the corridor deserted; then, off at the farther end, where the light was dim, she made out the figure of a young Chinese woman or girl, sitting back on her heels before an arm-chair of carved blackwood.

The girl was cooing and humming in a soft, musical voice that rippled, at the moment, into suppressed laughter. She would lean forward and with merry little exclamations play with something that was hidden by the high, solid arm of the chair; then would lean back, cover her face with her hands, and peep mischievously through her fingers, while her silk-clad shoulders shook and her daintily poised head bobbed with delight.

Miss Austin heard a step and turned. Teddy Hansel was approaching his own door. Impulsively she beckoned to him, at the same time laying a finger on

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"Oh, say — Pretty! Pretty!" muttered Teddy Hansel.

her lips. He tiptoed to her side with exaggerated caution.

"Say," he whispered. "It 's the Princess herself!"

Edith nodded.

While they stood there, leaning close to the edge of the screen, the girl pounced forward, fumbled a mo-

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The girl was wheeling and dancing slowly, dandling and cuddling the queer little baby.

ment with the object on the chair, then raised aloft — laughing that soft, rippling laugh — a Chinese baby. She cuddled it against her neck. She bent her head close to it and cooed playful little messages. She pirouetted, with exquisite ease of movement, along the corridor toward the screen. Plainly her feet had never been bound.

"Oh, say — Pretty! Pretty!" muttered Teddy Hansel.

Miss Austin drew back. She suddenly felt uncomfortable. It was something in Teddy's voice, in his manner, in the odd way he held his breath after the one muttered exclamation and then

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bent rigidly forward, staring. She knew, or felt, that what had so suddenly attracted him was not the charm and beauty of the scene — a moment before it had been merely a quaint oriental spectacle — but a subtle lure in the movements of the girl.

Edith wished she had not beckoned to him. She stirred restlessly, and made a move to unlock her door, but Teddy was motionless. She looked again down the corridor. The girl was still wheeling and dancing slowly along, dandling and cuddling the queer little baby, cooing and chuckling with careless, instinctive enjoyment of the morsel of a human plaything in her arms. Her fan dropped unheeded to the floor. Plainly she herself was a girl, and not a mother; a grown girl in whom a doll or a baby has the power to stir deep and unaccountable thoughts.

"She 's not a minute over fifteen," thought Edith, with increasing discomfort. There was something in the little scene, something deeply intimate, that Teddy should not have witnessed. It was beautiful; but Teddy did not know that it was beautiful — in that way. Edith glanced at him. She had thought of him as a chum who happened to be an irresponsible boy. Now she suddenly saw him a long way off, on the other side of a gulf that it was vaguely distressing even to think of.

An old woman, with stumps of feet, hobbled out from a doorway and took the baby. The girl went back alone to look for her fan.

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"Come," said Miss Austin to the motionless Teddy, "let 's get started."

He slowly straightened up, but neither answered nor turned his eyes.

The girl, however, heard the voice. She started, swung around, and for an instant looked directly at them. Then, nervously, almost wildly, her big, slanting eyes darted this way and that for means of escape. A door stood open. She scurried toward it, and disappeared.

Teddy stepped back and drew a long breath. His eyes evaded hers. Apparently he was searching for some casual remark that did not come readily to his tongue.

"Going to change your clothes, are n't you?" he finally managed to say. "Guess I 'll do the same. This rig 's no good to knock around in." And he went abruptly to his own room.

Miss Austin slipped her key into the lock and slowly turned it. She opened the door a little way, then hesitated and glanced back there around the screen.

The girl was peeping out from her doorway, with frightened, fascinating gaze.

Their eyes met. Edith smiled. The girl took a timid step toward her — then another. As she advanced her courage seemed to rise. Slowly, a hesitating step at a time, nervous as a bird, she came on clear to the screen and looked out around it, so near that Edith could almost have reached out and touched her painted face.

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It was a small, perfectly oval face. The rouge on her cheeks hid whatever color may have been beneath it; but through the white powder on her forehead and temples a pink flush was struggling to make itself seen. Her carmine lips were parted in a shy, excited smile. She was breathing rapidly. In her eyes were dancing points of light.

Edith smiled again; and an expression that ranged from fear to a wild delight came into the oval face. Edith opened her door, with a little gesture of invitation. The girl's eyelids drooped, and she appeared to hesitate. She took one timid step into the narrow opening between the screen and the wall.

At this full view of her in the light, Edith drew in a quick breath of surprise and pleasure. Her Chinese woman's coat and trousers were of a wonderful peacock blue. The material appeared to be a sort of silk crêpe. The costume was severely plain except for a circle of exquisitely embroidered flying birds and pale pink blossoms around the collar and similar circles around the cuff of each sleeve. Her little silk slippers, too, peeping out from beneath the loose-hanging trousers, were embroidered with birds and pink blossoms. Her jet-black hair was built into an elaborately simple coiffure that ended in waves on her forehead and swept down over all but the tip of each ear in a long, glossy curve. From the ears hung translucent circles of sea-green jade enclosed in circlets of beaded gold. And on the slim fingers that gripped the edge of the screen were two rings,— one an oblong of jade set in a rim

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She took one timid step.

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of gold dragons, the other a trick- or love-ring of soft gold worked into the semblance of clasped hands.

Suddenly the girl's courage failed. She slipped back behind the screen and giggled softly.

Edith, as she entered her own room, reflected on the shut-in life of a high-bred Chinese girl to whom the merest glimpse of the great free outside world of men and women, of travel and recreation and love, brings such a strange, wild intoxication. What an experience it must be for this little person to spend these weeks in the big foreign hotel! Her father had spoken with feeling when he said, "Your freedom, your self-control, your hearty outdoor life — these our girls must learn from you."

Miss Austin's room was lofty and dim, with thick walls through which no ordinary conversation could penetrate; and it opened through wide folding-doors into a sun-parlor that looked out on the courtyard of the hotel. This smaller room was walled in at either end with other pairs of folding-doors; evidently so devised as to permit of throwing open a continuous passage around the interior wall of the court. One of these pairs of doors, that separated her from the crowded quarters of the Chinese establishment, she herself kept locked. The other, leading to Teddy Hansel's room, had no key, at least on her side; but she had tried the door and found it fast. She had hesitated to make a point of speaking about it either to Teddy himself or to the manager.

There were easy chairs and a couch in the sun-parlor,

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and Edith often sat there of an afternoon sewing or browsing in the books on Oriental porcelain and rug-making and the early periods of painting that her uncle bought lavishly and never himself opened. Through the crevices about the double doors queer delicate odors came floating to her nostrils, odors that subtly stirred her imagination and that lingered in her thoughts even when she was in the very European dining-room of the hotel or out on the streets of the Legation Quarter. They often drove from her consciousness the smell of cigarettes that filtered in interminably from Teddy Hansel's room on the other side. They conjured up romantic pictures of the quite unreal old Cathay of enchanted memory that never existed anywhere except on screens and fans and sleeve-embroideries and willow-ware. Late every afternoon and through the evenings there always came a burning odor that she thought might prove suffocating if one got too much of it; and she always wondered, with a little thrill, if it could be opium.

She slipped out of her dinner-gown and into a walking-suit. Then she stepped for a moment into the sun-parlor and sniffed the air. There it was, unmistakably — the choking smell. And less distinct, a faint background of odors, was that confusion of other smells that traditionally suggests the ancient, slumbrous East. . . . Then suddenly her mind pictured the kindly Chinese gentleman with the round spectacles who, in his corner room, understood American girls — the man who had played third base at Yale and who hoped to

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"see Ty Cobb on the bases before he — how do we say it? — slows up." The thing was too bewilderingly unreal!

Her eyes were dreamy when she walked lightly through the bedroom and with unconscious swiftness threw open her door.

Then she stopped short, and stood motionless on the threshold.

For there was Teddy Hansel — still in his dinner clothes, but with his overcoat and hat on — backing hurriedly away from the screen, while a slow flush came over his face.

He started to speak; but stopped before he began, with a flash of eager effort in his eyes, and mouth that remained slightly open. He took another backward step or two, then stood still. . . . Edith, for the moment, could not move; she was still poised on the threshold, her hand clasping the doorknob. And the unsettling sense of discomfort that had left her during that brief quarter-hour in her room was returning now and was increasing with each second. She knew, even before she could collect her fluttering thoughts, that the queer look on Teddy's face was a look of guilt. She felt an impulse to run away . . . it was something she should not have seen . . . it forced them both tacitly to recognize a fact that was in its nature a secret.

There was a rustle behind the screen.

Teddy turned; took a few steps; stopped; fumbled in his pocket for his cigarette case; then, still irresolute,

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turned toward his own door, muttering something that sounded like —" Get my stick."

Edith watched him enter his room. She wondered, since he was only going for his stick, why he closed the door after him. Then, conscious that her own color was rising, she locked her door and went out past the office into the main hall. The impulse to run away was still stirring within her; but, unable to overcome that queer sinking of the heart, unable for the moment to think clearly, she stood for a little while on the outer fringe of the crowd that surrounded the conjuror. Then, still restless and undecided, she sank into a chair by the wall.

A few more minutes passed. She began to wish desperately that Teddy would come. Not that she wanted to see him — she dreaded it with rather absurd intensity — but . . . Over across the hall Mr. Carpenter, looking very comfortable, was quietly reading the China *Critic*. She wished he would come over and talk to her. Perhaps he did n't know she was here.

A big, bearded man in evening dress was approaching her. It was M. Stokoff of the Russian Legation. She tried for a moment to avoid his gaze; his witty compliments were a little hard to parry if you were tired and your thoughts were afield.

But the suave personalities had hardly begun before Mr. Carpenter, with an easy nod for the Russian, appeared beside her. A little later M. Stokoff moved away.

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Edith stole a glance at Mr. Carpenter. He must be wondering why she was here, alone, dressed for the street. It was nice of him not to ask questions.

"I was going to the moving-picture show with Teddy Hansel," she said finally. "But it is getting pretty late."

He looked at his watch. "You have been waiting nearly half an hour," said he. "If the young man does n't come pretty soon, I should say he does n't deserve to go anywhere with you."

She managed to smile.

"Shall I look him up?"

"Oh, no!" she replied, a bit hastily. "It does n't matter."

He looked thoughtfully at her. "I am tempted," he said, in a gently humorous tone, "to suggest that you walk out with me."

She hesitated. Her sober eyes flitted to the conjuror's corner, to the office at the end of the hall, to the opening in the southern corridor. Unconsciously she compressed her lips; then rose, and looking up at the tall Mr. Carpenter, who towered above her, smiled very impersonally.

"I should like to — very much," she said.

His hat and stick were at hand. They passed out the door and through the court-yard. At the sidewalk, as he swept back with his cane the crowding, importunate rickshaw coolies, she drew a long breath and looked up at him. "I wonder if he's *more* than thirty-five!" she was thinking.

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They walked to the western end of Legation Street, turned off to the left just beyond the American compound, and slowy mounted the old stone ramp to the top of the fifty-foot wall that encloses the Tartar City.

The grass was growing rank up here between the crumbling parapets. They strolled for a time, then sat on a fallen stone with their backs against the parapet. There was no moon, but the electric street-lamps lighted the air and threw long shadows across the broad top of the wall. On their left, a few hundred yards away, loomed the great tower of the Chien Gate, with its square pagoda roofs, one above another, outlined dimly against the night sky. On the right, at a greater distance and less distinct, stood the tower of the Ha Ta Gate. The scent of lilacs floated up to them on the mild spring air from the garden of the American Minister, directly beneath. And they could hear the Marines singing on the steps of the barracks.

"It 's pleasant," said Miss Austin.

"The singing?"

"And the lilacs — everything. Yes, they have nice voices. Even that miserable old 'Casey Jones' sounds musical up here."

They fell silent for a time.

Then —"Look," said he; "you can just make out the roofs of the Forbidden City — over there to the north."

She peered through the dark, then leaned back against the parapet, sighed, and stirred restlessly.

"I was thinking," she said, after a silence, "of the

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women in there, in the Forbidden City — and the girls."

"It is just as well not to think about women and girls in China," said he. "At best, it is a rather tragic subject."

"Yes, I suppose it is." She controlled a shudder. "They — they kill girl babies, don't they?"

"It is thought that they do, especially the second or third girl in a family."

"And it is considered impolite to speak to a man about his daughters."

"Oh, yes. All through the Orient, you know, the woman is nothing. She is simply the plaything of the man. And then of course —" his voice dropped into the gentle, kindly tone that she was beginning to like — "she is the mother. But there is no recognition of the dignity and nobility of love. In China girls are sold into marriage. It is usually arranged through brokers."

Edith was sitting erect now. "And they often kill themselves rather than go to the husbands they have never seen," she said, with some heat. "I read about it in one of Uncle's books. And then if they fall in love with the wrong man, if — well, they are killed."

He nodded. "That 's about it."

"So that, either way, they have no chance!"

"No — no chance, that is if a girl is cursed with feelings and character of her own. But there you are! That is China. Their customs were ancient and settled when we were chasing each other through the wilds

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of Europe with stone axes. The one thing you can't expect any Chinaman to understand is our feeling about women."

"Pao Ting Fang understands, I think," said she, with a rather surprising ring of conviction in her voice.

He looked curiously at her, then turned his gaze back to the dim roofs of the city; and, after a little, fell to telling her stories of his travels in Borneo and Celebes and the islands of the South Seas. Slowly she became interested. She began asking eager questions. Before they returned to the hotel he had made her laugh a little.

But when he had said good-night and disappeared up the stairway, her depression returned. She went to her door, hesitated, and came back to the office to see if Teddy had left word for her. But there was nothing in her box.

Rather hurriedly she returned to her room, and threw off her gloves, coat, and hat. Without switching on the light she walked through to the smaller room and for a few moments gazed out from her darkness into the dimly lighted court-yard. She stood listening, as if awaiting the sound of voices from the other side of the double doors. Then, abruptly, she went back into the bedroom, where no sounds could be heard, lighted up, and undressed. She gave up an unusually long time to feeding Wing and making him comfortable for the night. She stood for a long moment by the bed, looking at it and wondering if it would be possible for her to sleep.

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It was, of course, too absurd, working herself up over what doubtless had been a trivial episode. She slipped into a kimono and tucked herself up in a steamer-rug on a couch. She even opened the big book on porcelain and tried to read the chapter on the celebrated crackle-ware of the period of K'ang Hsi. But her mind was clouded by waves of unreason. She fell every now and then into listening for sounds. To her sensitive nostrils came stale odors of the East that set her mind racing through an improbable, fantastic dream region. And the one clear object in all these confused half-dreams was a painted oval face, and carmine lips that parted in a shy, excited smile, and a pair of big slanting eyes with dancing points of light in them . . .

The next morning Edith sat long over breakfast, while her second cup of coffee grew slowly cold. Her eyes flitted constantly to the door of the big dining-room; but Teddy did not appear. Her aunt sat with her, and remarked on the clothes of the women.

He and she had fallen into the custom of meeting in the main hall after breakfast and discussing plans for the day. She thought of going out there and waiting for him; then put the idea aside and went on answering her aunt's occasional questions. But the time came when Mrs. Wilberly was ready to go. Edith followed, slowly and thoughtfully.

She lingered in the hall, outwardly composed, looking at the embroideries and at some silk laces from Chefoo. But he did not come.

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Teddy did not appear in the dining-room at noon. Nor, so far as she could see, was any food carried to his room.

She was conscious of some restraint on the part of her aunt and uncle. They were talking in low tones when she joined them for tiffin; and they avoided her questioning eyes. Then, too, she had observed the elder Hansel holding a very grave conversation with the bearded Belgian manager of the hotel and Mr. Wun, interpreter to His Excellency.

Pao Ting Fang himself, however, appeared in the dining-room with his suite precisely as usual; bowed and smiled to his acquaintances; went through the meal in dignified solitude, as was his custom; and returned directly to his own quarters.

After luncheon, Mr. Wilberly, still avoiding Miss Austin's eyes and with a muttered excuse, left the table.

Then Mrs. Wilberly, after one or two ineffectual efforts to find words, said: "Edith, if I were you I would n't have anything to do with the Hansel boy."

Miss Austin sank back in her chair and turned her big hazel eyes full on her aunt. The color left her face.

"Wh—" It was oddly difficult to speak. "Why?"

Mrs. Wilberly smoothed down her lace jabot.

"He is in very serious trouble. An awful scrape, if you ask me. The boy must be crazy."

"Has he — run away, Aunt?"

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"No, he has n't. It would be much better if he had."

Edith asked no more. She could not think clearly. She avoided speaking to the acquaintances she met in the hall; and went to her room as soon as she decently could.

As she opened her door she glanced back toward the main hall and saw Mr. Hansel, senior, turning slowly away from the manager's desk and heading into the corridor. He came on toward his son's door. His face was grave; she had not before noticed how deeply it was lined. And he walked heavily, like an old man.

She slipped into her room and hurried through to the sun-parlor; stood motionless for a second, her slim body tense, her hands nervously clasping and unclasping at her sides. Suppose Mr. Hansel were to find the girl there in his son's room,— what would they do to her? She bit her lip. She was desperately trying to think. There was her father, the great Mandarin of Peking and Yale — If the public disgrace could be averted, would he understand? Oh, why did n't somebody *do* something!

She abruptly knocked on the double door that led to Teddy's room.

"What 's that!" she heard him cry out excitedly.

Then came another sound — the sound of a woman whimpering.

"Cut it out!" she heard him mutter. "For God's sake be still!" But the whimpering went on.

Straining her ears, she could distinctly hear another,

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fainter knocking. It was surely Mr. Hansel, out there in the corridor.

Miss Austin spoke; not too loud but with deliberate distinctness.

"Please open this door!"

There was sudden silence in the next room, then a repetition of the fainter knocking in the corridor.

She heard him move. He stumbled against a chair. The girl whimpered again.

The key turned on his side. The door opened, and Teddy Hansel stood there. His hair was tousled, his face white and haggard. His overbright eyes stared out of dark circles. A wisp of smoke curled up from the cigarette between his brown fingers.

Behind him, the girl was curled in a round little heap on the couch, her face buried on her arms.

Edith went swiftly to her and raised her head. The girl would not look at her, but covered her face with her hands. The short coat and trousers of peacock blue silk were wrinkled; the wonderful coiffure was disarranged, and straight strands of oily black hair hung down over her forehead. The momentary glimpse Edith caught of her face showed that the powder and paint were gone, leaving only a few streaky remains of rouge and carmine on a skin that was like smooth old ivory.

Edith raised her, and, an arm about her shoulders, walked with her through the doorway into her own room. "It 's all right," she was saying,—"just come with me. It 's all right."

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"No good talking English to her," whispered Teddy Hansel excitedly. "She can't understand a word!"

But Miss Austin hardly heard. "Quick," she said to him, "get everything of hers out of your room."

Mr. Hansel was knocking again, out in the corridor, and rattling the door-knob.

Teddy Hansel let himself in, and dropped wearily into an easy chair.

Edith stood looking down at the huddled figure on her couch. A peacock blue shoulder and a black head of straggling hair showed above the fringed end of the steamer rug. She turned and suddenly realized that the boy was there. She motioned toward the door, unable to speak at the moment. She could not endure the thought of having him in her room. But he paid not the slightest attention to her.

"The Governor 's not satisfied," he remarked, in a husky voice. "He does n't quite dare come to you — yet. And I don't think he 's spoken to your uncle. What next? We 're not clear yet, by a lot! Got to dispose of her somehow." He shivered perceptibly. "It 's like having a body on your hands. God, you don't know all I 've been through! She lost her nerve — would n't go back."

Edith tried to say "Please go!" But the boy, self-centered, rushed on.

"The Governor 's gone out somewhere. He looks bad — older. I 'm scared about him. He 's always been — I never thought of Dad's breaking."

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He choked. For the first time she looked squarely at him, and she saw that he was staring wildly. Suddenly his face twitched, and he covered it with his hands.

"My God, Edith," he cried, "do something! Don't you see? Don't you —"

"Please — please go!" she said.

"But think what I've done! I've gone to pieces. And I've queered the Governor! I've put him in bad!" He was actually sobbing. And his voice was rising. She had never before seen a man cry. "I'm a helpful little person, I am! There's a hundred million dollars at stake,— and it's up to Dad. A heap of negotiating he'll do on the strength of this!"

"Hush!" she said. "Be quiet!"

He slid down low on the chair, stretched out his thin legs across the floor, thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets. His chin sagged on his chest.

Miss Austin straightened up, with an unconscious little gesture of despair, and for a moment stood looking out the window. Her lips were compressed; her hands were clasping and unclasping straight down by her sides; and she was very still. She was thinking, swiftly, of this strange man in her room — the man who had yesterday been her boy chum. She was thinking that here, perhaps, was tragedy. A slang sentence, phrased as the Teddy of yesterday would have phrased it, was racing over and over, round and round, in her mind —

"It is up to me! It is up to me!"

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Suppose she were to — what if —?

She turned, with a nervous jerk of her head. There was a light in her eyes, and an added touch of color on her cheeks.

She went to the Chinese girl, and stood over her, looking down at the peacock blue shoulder and the disordered hair. Then, very gently and tenderly, she roused her, smiled down her fears, got her to her feet, and led her into the bedroom.

"Wait! What are you going to do?"

She heard the voice, and she knew in a sort of way that he had followed them as far as the bedroom door; but it was several seconds before she could sufficiently master the queer repugnance he roused in her to frame a reply.

Finally she said: "Take her to her father."

"But —"

"What else?" Edith's voice was taking on a cutting edge that no one had ever heard in it before. "What else? Kill her? Marry her?"

"But he 's a Chinaman. He won't understand!"

"There 's not a man in the hotel who would understand it better."

"But what are you going to tell him about — about me?"

Miss Austin stood motionless, holding tight to the arm of the drooping girl and looking straight into the face of this man whom she was seeing for the first time. She seemed to be trying, against her inner difficulty, to

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frame a reply. But she gave it up and turned to go, leaving him standing there very white.

She opened the door a few inches and peeped up the corridor toward the office. Seizing a moment when no European face was in sight, she slipped out and around the screen. The Chinese girl hung back, even struggled a little, but Edith drew her rapidly along. She was much the stronger.

A wrinkled old woman with crippled feet appeared in a doorway, sipping tea from a rice bowl. She looked, started, dropped the bowl. It broke into a dozen pieces; and the woman hobbled forward over the shards and through little rivers of steaming tea. She caught the sleeve of the Chinese girl, jabbering in excited singsong. Miss Austin jerked the girl away and hurried on.

Two other old women appeared. Several soldiers and one of the Mandarins hurried out of a room. Edith brushed rapidly by them.

A soldier barred the passage that led to the big corner room. She pushed him aside with her hand, and went on with the girl trailing after. The passage was dim, and Edith stumbled against the inner door. She checked the impulse to knock; she must go on, following without hesitation the wild impulse that had brought her thus far. She opened the door, pulled the girl in, and closed it after her.

His Excellency was sitting alone at a modern flat-top desk that was heaped with papers and books. He

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looked up, and took in the extraordinary situation without the twitch of a muscle — merely bowed gravely.

Miss Austin hesitated only long enough to recover her breath and to clasp firmly the limp hand of the girl, then came deliberately forward across the broad expanse of carpeted floor. It seemed a very long way. And every moment she felt his eyes on her — the quiet, rather stern eyes behind the gold-rimmed spectacles. The girl was hanging back desperately now, and their progress was slow. Not a word was uttered. Finally, when they had nearly reached the desk, the girl broke away, staggered to a chair by the wall, and sank down, hiding her face.

Miss Austin stood before the desk. She looked very girlish and simple with her high color and blazing eyes.

His Excellency, Pao Ting Fang, rose and bowed. Whatever surprise or other emotion he may have felt was hidden behind a mask of Oriental self-control.

"It is very kind of you," he said.

Then he was silent.

His courtesy was perfect; but there was no mistaking that his greeting was also a dismissal. She unconsciously compressed her lips; then drew a long breath.

"I was sure you would understand —"

He bowed again.

"I — may I speak a word for her?"

His eyebrows rose a very little, and, strangely, he smiled.

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She had to go on, however blindly. "I think perhaps an American girl who has — well, traveled some, can understand another girl better than a man can. Any man. I know that"— she faltered, but kept at it —"that your Chinese custom is very hard on girls. I want to ask you to be gentle with her. I came to ask that."

It was all pitifully inadequate.

Pao Ting Fang glanced up at a European clock on the wall. It was twenty minutes to three. He turned his eyes toward a door at the side of the room.

"I regret," he said, in his even voice, "that there is not time to discuss this now. At three I am receiving an important deputation."

Again he waited for her to go.

"But — Your Excellency — don't you see, this is a human life . . ."

She faltered, and knit her brows. Something was the matter. She was not reaching him.

"I am sorry. I must ask you to go."

But she lingered. "I — I want to help her. It is so big — a matter of life and death like this."

He merely bowed, and smiled again that smile that was uncanny. He bent down, opened the top drawer of the desk, and looked through it. He went swiftly through another drawer. Evidently whatever he sought was not there. He stood for a moment — only for a moment — plunged in thought; then moved to the girl and rested a firm hand on her shoulder.

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Miss Austin saw her slender body quiver at the touch of that hand.

He said something in Chinese. The vagrant thought drifted through Edith's mind that as he spoke the language it sounded like French.

The girl did not reply — merely sobbed, very quietly.

Her father spoke again.

Haltingly, choking, low-voiced, she answered.

He turned to Edith. "I am exceedingly sorry, Miss Austin. You have been most kind, but there is nothing more you can do."

There was on his face an expression of gentle, fatalistic resignation that stirred Edith's Western spirit to a fever of protest.

"Oh — please," she cried, "let her come to me! I will care for her. I will take her home with me."

He shook his head, smiling sadly. "You forget, Miss Austin, that they would not permit her to enter your country. This problem, I fear, is not for you to solve. I must ask you to go. I regret it. I must ask you to go."

But Edith reached for the back of a chair and clung to it, shaking her head. Pao Ting Fang glanced again at the clock. Then gravely, with impenetrable calm, he crossed the room to a high lacquered cabinet. From one of the compartments he took a small box of carved ivory. This box he opened; and Edith, from where she stood, could see that it was full of white tablets.

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He returned to his daughter, gently raised her head, and put the box into her hand.

The girl stared at it a moment, then, with a catch of her breath that sounded very loud in the silent room, slipped to the floor and sat on her heels, leaning sidewise against the chair.

She raised her grotesquely streaked face, and looked out between wisps of hair, first at one closed door, then at the other. She turned wildly toward the windows. She even looked at the ceiling. Trembling and whimpering she fingered the tablets. She took one out of the box and fumbled with it for a moment.

Then, most unexpectedly, she looked up and faced her father. An expression came into her face that Miss Austin did not at all understand — a flash of defiance in the eyes, a momentary smile that had a measure of exultation in it. It was as if some wild, wonderful memory had suddenly come to her aid and had transfigured her. It was very strange.

Looking finely and directly at her father she slipped the tablet into her mouth and gulped it down. She hurriedly took a second and a third. After a little she took two more. She seemed to be growing drowsy. Her head sank back. Her father supported it. The pupils of her eyes grew slowly small — and smaller. They dwindled to mere pin-points. They seemed to disappear. She lay motionless in her father's arms.

Edith groped her way to the door. Her knees were giving under her. She caught at a chair, then at the

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doorknob. She let herself into the dim passage, closed the door after her, and clung to it for a moment. She brushed past the sentry. Several of the Mandarins were coming into the passage. They made way for her, and stared at her with the mild-eyed, inoffensive curiosity of the East. The foremost was Mr. Wun, the interpreter. He bowed and smiled.

Teddy Hansel lay sprawled on the couch in Miss Austin's sun-parlor, smoking and petting little Wing.

"Well," he asked petulantly, "how about it? What happened?"

Miss Austin gave a start, and then stood still, looking at him.

After a moment she got to his door and opened it. "You 'd better go," was all she could manage to say.

"But I say," observed he, getting to his feet, "you seem to forget the fix I 'm in. How 'm I to know what to do — how to act — if you don't tell me?"

Meeting her direct gaze he weakened and moved toward the doorway, and through it.

"Like to know where *I* get off," he was muttering.

Miss Austin deliberately took the key from his side, closed the door, and locked it.

She opened the casement, and sank into a chair. It seemed to her that there was n't fresh air enough in all the world to supply her need.

Even with the window open there was the odor of cigarette smoke from the next room. She got up nervously and put on her hat and the jacket of her

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suit. She walked out of the room and along the corridor.

The banking gentlemen were grouped by the office,

"Well," he asked petulantly, "how about it? What happened?"

twelve or fifteen of them. Nearby stood an equal number of His Excellency's Mandarins, in full regalia.

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Mr. Wun, the interpreter, stepped forward.

"Aw leady, Gen'lemen," said he cheerfully.

The two groups, yellow men and white, moved by her down the passage.

But Mr. Hansel lingered, and touched the genial Mr. Wun on the arm.

"Is there any news of the girl?" he asked, very low.

"Oh, yes, oh, yes," replied the Oriental, with a smile that fairly illumined his round face. "Tha' was awr a mistake. She di 'n' go 'way. Ev'yting aw light — aw light!"

Mr. Hansel gazed at the interpreter with complete mystification written on his face. He seemed on the point of framing another question. But he gave it up, and followed the others along the corridor and behind the screen to the big corner room where His Excellency, Pao Ting Fang, smiling and serene, awaited them to discuss the terms on which the bankers of the Six Powers would permit China to live. Mr. Hansel's feet shuffled slightly as he walked, and his body gave the appearance of sagging with each step.

It was "aw light." The girl was dead. There would be no publicity and no trouble. It was now merely a matter of that hundred million dollars.

Miss Austin walked out through the court-yard to the street and looked about her.

As she stood there a rickshaw drew up at the curb, and Mr. Carpenter stepped out. She greeted him with

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a wan smile. He looked very big and solid and — well, normal, as he stood there smiling down at her. So, on an impulse, she said the things that made him ask if he might walk with her.

They again climbed the ramp to the top of the great Tartar Wall. They walked on the wall, past the German barracks, through the tower of the wonderful Ha Ta Men, and on clear to the corner where the wall swings north. Then they walked back.

"Please let me sit here and rest a little," said Miss Austin, as they were passing above the American barracks. "We sat here that other time — last year, or last night, or whenever it was!"

He smiled; but not gaily, for she was pale. And it had been difficult to keep her from walking altogether too rapidly. "The child is a bundle of nerves to-day," he was thinking.

"The lilacs are still there," he observed, sniffing the balmy afternoon air. "So it could n't have been more than a week or two ago if it was this year. And it could n't have been last year, because then I was in Sarawak. Have you ever heard of Rajah Brooke?"

"Please," she said, "don't tell me about him — not now."

He looked away toward the glazed yellow roofs of the Forbidden City that were glistening in the late afternoon sunlight like acres and acres of bright gold scattered about in a setting of the pale, filmy foliage of spring. Peking, seen from the wall, is a city built in a forest.

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"Nor about the Sultan of Johore," persisted Mr. Carpenter whimsically, "and how he came to have the diamond set in his front tooth?"

Miss Austin gravely shook her head. "Not even about the diamond," she said. "I 've got to do some talking, myself. I 've got to say one thing right now, or I shall scream. And there is nobody in Peking, unless it is you, that I can say it to."

He was silent.

She hesitated, and drew in a quick breath. If he had glanced around he would surely have seen that she was fighting back unruly tears. But he did not glance around. She liked him for that.

"I was thinking," she said, very slowly and a thought unsteadily, "that if I don't watch out I shall find myself loathing men — *loathing* them." She repeated the word with a slight, unexpected explosive quality in her voice.

She made an effort to compose herself; then suddenly realized that he was still looking off at those shining yellow roofs — rather grimly, it appeared. The unruly tears rushed into her eyes. She rested a light hand on his sleeve. "Please," she added, gently — "please don't misunderstand that."

"I don't think I shall misunderstand," said he, quietly.

After a little he deliberately shifted his position and looked at her. He saw a slim young girl with a great deal of fluffy hair that escaped from under her hat and hid all but the tip of an ear; and he saw a pale, tired

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"You 're *not* old," said she—"not a bit. . . . I don't like young men."

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face, with an expression that was in part a new, quite unaccustomed sadness and in part sheer hurt and bewilderment. He liked her long straight nose and the little point to her chin. "Good stuff," he thought; "good stuff there." He was conscious of her spirit, her quick vitality, even in this hour of depression. He was conscious, too, of her vast ignorance of life, and of her charm.

She felt his eyes on her, and looked up. There was no self-consciousness in her gaze, as her eyes rested on his face. And she was wholly impersonal — armored with the baffling reticence and inexperience of youth.

He clasped a bony knee in his big, muscular hands; and smiled. She responded, rather vaguely. He saw, clearly enough, that she was thinking about any one or anything on earth but himself.

"I 'm rather a hard-headed person," he said. "My job in life is buying cutch — and such — for a house in Chicago that deals in essential oils. But I 'm a pretty good listener, and you may tell me anything you care to — I mean, if there 's something that you 've simply got to tell somebody. That 's one of the advantages of getting old — you do learn how to listen."

Miss Austin shook her head at him. "You 're *not* old," said she —"not a bit. . . . I don't like young men."

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VI

THE CAMEL OF HAN

"UNCLE FRANK has a grouch," thought Miss Austin, glancing with quiet eyes across the table, "because I 'm late to dinner. He 's going to be ugly in a minute."

With which observation she dropped her gloves into her lap, pinned up her veil, and told the Chinese waiter in her best Pidgin English that she would skip soup and fish and begin with the roast.

"I 've been with Miss Eavesby all afternoon," she explained sweetly, in hope of averting the storm, "at the English Board Mission. She 's ill, you know. But she is wonderful — her experiences and the fight she has made for her people out in Shansi. She would die for those heathens in a minute."

The cloud on Mr. Wilberly's fat face was gathering into a scowl. Edith had forgotten his particular dislike of the missionaries. Now, doubtless, she had turned him on. He would rant. She disliked ranting. She hesitated; but then concluded, a thought defiantly:

"I wish I had started as a missionary. My life is so useless. I 'd like to be right out there in the fight with Rhoda Eavesby."

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Mr. Wilberly sought the eyes of his wife; but that rather evasive person was absorbed in study of a simple but surprisingly effective pink Liberty gown at the next table.

Mr. Wilberly cleared his throat. He was going to turn loose now. Edith knew it. She rested her cheek on a slender hand and set up a pretense of examining the menu.

"Do you think you're as considerate as you might be, Edith — knocking around Peking alone — at night, this way? How about your aunt and me? There are people who would hold us accountable for you. But the way you go on, never thinking of anybody but yourself, of anything but your own whims . . ."

Mrs. Wilberly, with a fluttering glance around, ventured:

"But I'm sure she came straight to the hotel from the Mission, Frank."

Mr. Wilberly was not to be headed off. "And the people you pick up, Edith! I tell you they're a bad lot out here. As a practical business-man I've had chances to observe 'em. They're a bad lot. Even experienced people get taken in. And you, a girl with not the slightest knowledge of life —"

"But a missionary!" faltered Edith, while the color slowly mounted her cheeks. "You just don't know, Uncle Frank. She is a saint."

"She *is n't* a saint!" sputtered Mr. Wilberly.

"Ssh!" breathed his wife. "Don't raise your voice, Frank!"

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But Mr. Wilberly had to get it all out. "They 're *not* saints — none of 'em. They 're a meddlesome lot of humbugs, mixing in things they 're not fitted to understand. Why don't they stick to their preaching! As a business man I —"

He paused. There was a long, long silence. Edith was still apparently intent on the menu; but her lashes drooped over eyes that had deepened from their usual hazel to a blazing brown. The flush lingered on her cheeks and temples. Surely everybody at the nearby tables must know that they were quarreling absurdly, grotesquely. Oh, how she hated scenes, argument, criticism! "After all" — the thought rushed into her mind on a hot wave of anger — "he 's only an uncle by marriage!"

He was eating now. She could hear him; but would not raise her eyes. The afternoon had been stirring, beautiful, at the bedside of that little, pale woman with the gently smiling mouth, thin hair, and luminous blue eyes. And the rickshaw ride, alone, at dusk, through the swarming, muddy streets of old Peking — there had been the stir of enchantment in it. And now — this! Tears were crowding into her eyes; she fought them back.

All through the meal the silence continued, until coffee-and-cigar time. Then Mr. Wilberly began to breathe heavily. He was going to say something. Edith wondered what. Probably an attempt at good-humor — something jocular, offhand. That was always likely, with him, to be the next phase after an

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outbreak. "Day after to-morrow," she reflected, "he 'll give me a pearl necklace or something. And I don't want him to. Oh, why can't people just *behave!*"

"Funny thing," began Uncle Frank, with an effort at a chuckle, "you know I 've been nibbling at one or two of those old vases at the porcelain merchant's in the Ha Ta High Street." (Yes, it was to be the off-hand vein.) "Well, Blumstein tipped me off to-day. You know the fellow has really got some fine Ming and K'ang Hsi stuff and wants big prices. But it seems he is acting for Heatherington, the English dealer that 's stopping here at the hotel."

"You don't say!" responded Mrs. Wilberly, eager to humor him.

"Yes, I do. Heatherington, it appears, brought the stuff all the way from London and is selling it here secretly to rich Americans. Can you beat it! Blumstein says he can average twenty per cent. higher prices here than in New York or London. Folks spend freer, you know, when they 're traveling. Fact. I do myself. Lucky I picked up this tip. I 'd have fallen for it sure. But never again! The next time I buy Chinese stuff, I buy in little old New York."

He attempted another chuckle, but with no great success. Edith did not so much as raise her eyes. The enveloping silence returned. Finally, muttering something about talking things over with Blumstein, he left them.

"You must try not to mind your uncle," said Mrs.

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Wilberly. "These indirect ways of doing business upset him. Everything is delay — delay — delay. And everybody smiles. It tries his patience dreadfully. It 's that matter of the Shansi Concession. He 's been thinking of nothing else since we landed at Shanghai, and I don't see that the thing has progressed an inch. I shall be glad, for one, when he definitely gives it up. Then maybe we could start back home. But as it stands now, nothing will suit Mr. Blumstein but our going clear out there to T'ai Yuan Fu. He says we shall have Government escort and there 'll be no possible danger."

"Well," replied Edith, in a low voice, "a glimpse of the Interior *would* be interesting. It has looked lately as if we were n't even going to have the trip to the Ming Tombs."

Mrs. Wilberly hesitated, and her eyes wandered. She was wondering how to rephrase her husband's sputterings on the subject: "I can't undertake to run my business and Edith, too — certainly not out there. It is all well enough for people that 'll stay put. But Edith — in T'ai Yuan? Not much!"

Finally she said: "Your uncle thinks it would be safer for us to leave you here at the hotel. The Oldhams wire that they 're coming in to-morrow on the Hankow train. And your uncle is sure they 'll be glad to take care of you."

"You 're leaving soon, then?"

"Why — yes. By the early train to-morrow morning. Some dreadful hour — six o'clock, I think. We

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won't disturb you. And you can stay right on here with the Oldhams."

Miss Austin turned away a face that gave no more hint of whatever thoughts were stirring behind it than was conveyed in a slightly bored smile. "If anybody 'takes care' of me," she was thinking, "it will be Rhoda Eavesby." And so, later that evening, after avoiding demurely but adroitly the already contrite advances of her uncle, she slipped away to her own room, and, with a snap in her eyes and an occasional little jerk of her prettily poised head, deliberately packed a wicker suit-case.

It was a trim, cheerful girl who appeared the next morning at the bedside of Miss Rhoda Eavesby in the English Board Mission, carrying a tiny black and white sleeve-dog and followed by a "boy" with a wicker suit-case.

The invalid greeted her with a wistful smile. "It is good of you to be so fresh and pretty, dear," she said, and clung to her hand. "You bring the lovely spring day right into the room with you."

Miss Austin blushed with pleasure, and averted her face under pretext of finding a comfortable hollow in the bed-clothing for Wing. "It *is* nice to see the sun again after all the rain we've had," she murmured. Then she looked up. "Was my telephone message *very* abrupt? Aunt and Uncle left for T'ai Yuan this morning — with Mr. Blumstein. I *could n't* stay around the hotel with those stupid Oldham people, so

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I made up my mind to come here. If you 'll let me, I 'll just take care of you until they come back."

This speech had an unexpected effect. The little missionary sat up straight, and sobered.

"My dear," she said —"wait! You don't mean *the* Blumstein, from Shanghai — Simon Blumstein, of the North China Development Company?"

Miss Austin nodded. "Yes, he 's from Shanghai. And his name is Simon, I think."

Miss Eavesby sat motionless for a long moment. Then: "I 've never thought to ask your uncle's name, dear."

Edith told her. Miss Eavesby knit her brows; then drew another pillow in behind her and leaned back against it. Edith, concerned, looked at the thin face, usually gentle and smiling but now keen, almost sharp, with a set to the mouth and a light in the blue eyes. For the first time she observed that Miss Eavesby had only the thinnest, faintest of eyebrows. "And yet," thought Edith, "she is beautiful."

"So they 're at it again," mused the missionary. She looked up and soberly studied the girlish face before her. "I don't quite know what to say —"

"If it 's about Uncle —?"

"I 'm afraid it is." She hesitated again. "But perhaps I 'd better tell you."

"Please do. What are they at again?"

"Well, suppose you look there in the middle bureau drawer — over to the right. Oh, just rummage things around! Now bring me that fat red portfolio. The

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whole story is in there somewhere." She drew thick bundles of papers from the various compartments and strewed them about the bed. "Here, this one. I translated them myself — all the petitions of the 'Gentry and People of Shansi.'" She smiled faintly. "Though perhaps 'petitions' is n't just the word."

She glanced over the document, and sighed. "Why do the foreigners have to come in and stir it all up again — this dreadful business — just because they are greedy for more, and more, and more! We missionaries come from Christian lands and try to teach the Gospel of our Christ to these yellow people, and then our leading citizens follow us and use the power and intelligence that is the birthright of civilization to rob them of all they have!"

The blue eyes were flashing now; and there was a spot of red on each cheek.

"Oh, well," she added, rather sadly, "you won't like to hear me say these things."

"Please go on," said Edith softly. "I want to understand."

"Well, fifteen years ago a European Company — the Shansi Syndicate, it was called — got a concession granting them the 'sole right' to work the best coal and iron mines of Shansi. They got it in the usual way, bribery at Peking. Native companies were prohibited from setting up modern machinery or competing in any effective way. The Province all but rose in arms. Listen to this. It sounds quaint, as I 've translated it; but, oh, they meant it!

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"'The People of Shansi must hold to their mines till death, as Li Pai Jen committed suicide on account of the mines, and about him we can only think with grief and sorrow and tears; yet if the Government and officials still unrighteously flatter the foreigners in their oppression and flay the people robbing them of their flesh and blood to give those to the foreigners then some one else must follow Li Pai Jen and throw away his own life by bomb-throwing and so repay the Syndicate!'"

The little missionary was sitting up very straight now. Her voice had deepened in *timbre*. Her eyes blazed with militant spirit. And Miss Austin sat fascinated in the stiff chair beside the bed, her young nerves tingling with a responsive thrill. "Oh," she was thinking, "how wonderful to believe in *anything* as much as that!"

Miss Eavesby quieted a little. "We beat them," she went on. "After ten years of pressure and manœuvering the Syndicate gave it up — pulled out. But they left a wreck behind them, a wreck of our work and our hopes. There are n't two other provinces in all the eighteen that hate foreigners and, yes, Christianity, as Shansi hates them. In nineteen-hundred they killed a hundred and eighty of our people — every white man, woman, and child that was in the Province at the time. They nearly did it again in nineteen-seven. We had to start all over then, for the third time, teaching them that Christianity does n't mean greed, bribery, plunder. We 've had to be so

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very, very patient. And now they 're at it again, working through the new Government, taking advantage of the unsettled conditions. Blumstein has never stopped watching Shansi. He wants that wonderful anthracite coal, and the iron. The great civilized Christian world wants that iron and coal. They will bribe, steal, murder, they will devastate a people, but they want that iron and coal."

She threw back the bed-clothes and swung her feet around, a frail little woman in a nightgown, sitting on the edge of the bed. Her feet groped their way into the slippers that stood there side by side.

"Oh, please," Edith murmured, "you must n't tire yourself! Please lie down again."

But the little missionary merely reached for a wrap and drew it about her shoulders. It was a Japanese scarf of crêpe silk, a soft gray in color, fringed at the ends and exquisitely embroidered with trailing wistaria blossoms, also in gray. Then she smiled gently, and replied:

"No, dear. I must get up and dress. I can't lie abed here, not with Simon Blumstein in T'ai Yuan. I 'm sorry to be inhospitable. Oh —" the blue eyes began flashing again —"oh, if I only had some money! With five hundred dollars I could beat Blumstein."

Miss Austin's eyes widened. "*You* could beat him?" she repeated, wondering.

The missionary compressed her lips and nodded. "*I* could do it. If I had the money. It 's a matter

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of new petitions and runners and traveling expenses for a dozen workers and a big meeting at T'ai Yuan. Yes, a meeting will do it. And such things cost *some* money, even in China. And of course I can't be active myself. Mr. Harbison won't let me. He says I 'm worse than having dynamite around. He is afraid of trouble. They 're all afraid."

She had been staring out the window as she spoke. Now she turned and looked at the rather bewildered face of the girl before her.

" I 'm afraid I run away with you, dear," she said gently. " I forget that you don't know these people as I do. But it is so absurdly simple, if we could only contrive to finance it. Everything is confused now, since the Revolution. The people are tired, and poor, and worried. And they don't know about it. Without leadership they will do nothing; and all those who might lead are fixed. It is not so different, my dear, from our home public; only worse — and they are incredibly poorer and more timid. . . . Blumstein has got the officials, of course, here and at T'ai Yuan. They have his money and the promise of more; and they 'll let him do whatever he can on his own, just so long as he does n't stir up trouble. But they won't back him in a crisis. They can't. If we can only stir up his trouble for him those canny old Mandarins will have to be with us or lose face. . . . Oh," she sighed, " with a little money, a little leadership, a little organization, posters on all the highways for a hundred miles out of T'ai Yuan, a big public meeting, one more

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mighty effort — just to make it *look* as if the people are still guarding their rights . . ."

She flung out her thin, white arms in a gesture of intense but despairing nervous energy, compressed her thin lips again, and got to her feet.

Edith sprang up and took her arm. "What are you going to do, Rhoda, dear?"

"Get into my clothes — write some letters — pack up."

Edith knit her brows. "But — but anyway you can't go to T'ai Yuan now."

"No, not until morning, worse luck. But I can't lie another minute in that bed."

"But, Rhoda, dear, if you have n't the money what good would it do?"

The little missionary steadied herself by the foot of the bed and looked at Edith. "I don't know," she murmured; and there was a hoarseness in her voice. "Every instinct I have drives me to go. But — I wonder." She sank into a chair and fixed her great eyes on the wall before her. "Cooped up in the Mission — unable to do any outside work myself — unable to employ others —" She pressed her hands to her temples. "I don't seem able to think clearly. Here is my fifteen years' fight going to nothing before my eyes — and somehow I 'm failing to meet the emergency!"

Miss Austin moved slowly to the window, and looked out (with eyes that saw very little) at the wet tennis-court where two Chinese youths in blue robes

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were languidly knocking a ball back and forth. She was stirring with indignation against her Uncle Frank. Why need he mix himself in this miserable exploitation of a weaker people. Then in a flash it came to her that the business of life, to which he was so passionately devoted, was precisely that — exploiting weaker peoples. He had talked enthusiastically, between platitudes, of the wonderful "opportunities for development" in Shansi. Now suddenly she knew what he meant. He meant bribery, stealth, sharp dealing in the letter of contracts, diplomatic trickery — in his heart a serene faith in the superior ultimate right and might of thirteen-inch guns and fourteen-inch armor plate from home.

When Edith looked around, the little missionary saw a pair of hazel eyes that had deepened in color and an unexpectedly firm mouth within the perfect oval of that girlish face.

"Would a hundred dollars help?" asked Edith quietly. "I have about a hundred and ten, gold, I think."

Miss Eavesby smiled sadly and shook her head. "Bless your dear heart, Edith — no. A small amount would be wasted. I said five hundred, but it would take rather more than less."

"I could n't possibly raise another cent without going to Uncle Frank," mused Edith; "and he is on the other side. We could n't expect him to put up money to defeat himself. No, we 're fighting him." And she sighed.

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"I want you to have this," said Miss Eavesby, a little later, folding the wistaria scarf with a loving touch, and laying it on Edith's suit-case.

"You want me — Why, my dear, I would n't *think* . . .!"

The little missionary laid her hand on Edith's arm. "Please," she said. "Please! I bought it for myself; and it was wrong. I must n't have it. I love it too much. I love pretty things."

"Of course you do," cried Edith. "Why should n't you? You *must n't* feel this way!"

Miss Eavesby's eyes filled, but she shook her head. "I want you to have it."

"But, my dear . . .!"

"I 've been caring for myself, gratifying myself; and all the time they needed me in Shansi!" She shook her head again; and for a little time went on with the business of dressing. Edith, in some bewilderment, sat watching her.

Finally the missionary came and took her by the shoulders and rested her cheek lightly on Edith's abundant fluffy hair. When she spoke, her voice was unsteady. "It 's the wrongest thing I do," she said, "clinging to my pretty things. It always blinds me. Every now and then, when I feel strong, I give them all away; then, the first thing I know I 'm tempted again, and I weaken. I love the wonderful old porcelain of China. I 've seen a moment when I would have sold my very soul for a Ming vase. They said it was Ming. I can't tell them apart myself — but the color

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was adorable. I had to make it a rule when I first came out here never to begin learning about such things. It is the only safe way, you know. If a demoralizing thought threatens to fill your mind, just shut it out altogether."

She stood erect. Edith caught a glimpse of her in the mirror above the bureau, brushing back from her flushed forehead a wisp of faded hair.

"I want you to take it, Edith, dear. I bought it in a fit of wilfulness. It 's the only thing I 've kept, this year, except my funny camel. That 's out at the Mission in T'ai Yuan; and anyway it is n't beautiful, just quaint. It 's nothing anybody would ever want, except me. Take this, please. Because I ask you to."

So Miss Austin, feeling suddenly old and strangely humble in the presence of this simple, militant child of a faith, packed the scarf among her own things in the wicker suit-case.

"What is this camel?" asked Miss Austin, turning away from the window and making an effort to speak in a casual tone.

"Oh, just a pottery image. It was given me by an old Chinese gentleman of Taiku, whom we cured of the opium habit."

"Has it any glaze or color?"

The little missionary knit her brows. "Why — yes, I believe it has. At least, it is n't rough clay like some of those old things. What are you getting at, Edith?"

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"Nothing."

"You are wondering if it has a value." She sighed. "If it had, I would have sold it long ago. Even though it was a present. You see, dear, it is only the beautiful things that are worth anything. The vases and such. My poor camel is just an old brown thing. Oh, it would bring a little something — five, ten, twenty-five dollars, even. Though I doubt it. You can buy all sorts and sizes of pottery and bronze animals for that. Why, even if it were ivory, it would n't fetch nearly enough. And it *is n't* ivory."

Miss Austin made no reply; merely looked at her for a moment through narrowed eyelids, then turned away. Memories of colored plates in her uncle's quarto volumes on Chinese Porcelains were passing in a confused series before her mind's eye. But she had only impressions, no exact knowledge. "If I only *knew!*" she was thinking. Very possibly Miss Eavesby was right.

"Come," said the little missionary, as if with a sudden resolution, "let 's waste no more thought on useless notions. I 've made up my mind. Blumstein is going to beat me at last; but when the beating comes I shall be in T'ai Yuan to take it. I can't stay here. It 's no good. You 've been a dear, Edith; I hate to leave you this way. But I 've got to take the early train to-morrow."

Miss Austin sat on the edge of the bed, picked up little Wing, and cuddled him against her cheek.

"I 'm going with you," she said.

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"Oh, no, my child . . .!"

Edith nodded. Her eyes were glistening.

"But it 's impossible. It might be actually unsafe."

"How about yourself?"

"That 's different."

"Why? How?"

"I 'm pledged to the service. It 's my work."

"Well," said Edith, slowly and with emotion, "it 's about time I was a *little* use — to somebody or something. I never have been yet. You have at least two degrees of fever right now. You need a nurse, that 's what you need. If you insist, after I get you safely to T'ai Yuan, I 'll join Aunt and Uncle, take my scolding, and come back with them. But you shan't go a step without me."

The little missionary looked thoughtfully at the determined, pretty face. She glanced down at the perfect lines and fit of the smart spring suit, up again at the simple walking hat and at the mite of a dog that was pressed close to the soft cheek of his mistress. And then she suppressed a sigh.

"I ought n't to let you go," she said.

"You are n't letting me," replied Edith. And she smiled excitedly as she turned away. Girl-like, she had not given her real reasons. She was going to T'ai Yuan Fu to see that camel!

They went south on the Hankow "local" that following morning, in a spring rain that drove incessantly against the windows of their dingy compart-

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ment. At Chingting they changed from the main line to the metre-gauge T'ai Yuan Fu line; and climbed, twisting and crawling along earthen precipices and creeping timidly over doubtful bridges that spanned swollen streams, into and over the terraced brown hills of Shansi. Late in the afternoon the train slid cautiously down into a wide valley where there were forts, and frequent villages, and twin pagodas, all misty-looking behind the sheets of rain, and glimpses of a city with high masonry walls and huge gate-towers. They were hustled across a crowded platform by Miss Eavesby's wrinkled servant, "Oldjohn," to rickshaws, and driven for a long time over rough streets with a great many turns. Then Miss Austin found herself in a modern brick house, talking to a Mr. and Mrs. Harbison, who had patient, kindly faces and tired eyes. Finally she and her little missionary were shown into adjoining bedrooms to change their wet clothing, sip tea, and rest.

An hour later Edith, looking astonishingly fresh and pretty in a pink kimono, was half sitting, half reclining on her bed, writing with a fountain pen in her diary, when Miss Eavesby entered the room with a square wooden box. Edith was shocked to observe how frail and white she looked.

"Oh, my dear," cried Edith reproachfully, "you ought to be resting! How on earth am I going to keep you off your feet? You 'll simply break down, dear!"

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The missionary carefully deposited the box on the foot of the bed and sat beside it.

"No," she replied, very gravely, "I shall not break down. Some day I shall wear out. That's all. I'm not sure that it matters now. Mr. Harbison tells me that the Province is all confusion. There's no more public spirit — the Revolution exhausted that. There's no trade to speak of. Robber bands are still prowling everywhere outside the cities; they've burned one of the Baptist posts between here and Sian Fu. The officials, like all the others, are looking out for themselves." She spread out her thin arms in the oddly oratorical way she had when she was stirred. "Oh, it is the perfect time for the Blumstein-Wilberly group! They're working fast, or as fast as you can work in China. Mr. Harbison says the new papers will be signed within two weeks, and the work will begin within a month. Blumstein must have felt very sure. He has invested heavily. His organization is ready — engineers all over the place. And I can't raise my hand. It would take me days and days, even if I had the money to work with."

She sighed, and for a moment studied the delicate embroidery on Miss Austin's kimono, even reached forward and absently fingered the thin silk. "That's Kioto embroidery," she mused. Then she went on: "I'm going to send you up to join your uncle and aunt the first thing to-morrow, Edith. It's safer. You see, the Governor himself is protecting them.

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It 's nearly a day's ride, by mule-litter. They 're in the hills, up north, stopping with Mr. Greene, Blumstein's chief engineer." She rested her fingers lightly on the toe of Edith's slipper. Her blue eyes filled. "You 've been a dear, Edith, to come way out here with me. I should n't have let you."

Miss Austin was looking at her with unconscious intentness. "You 're perfectly sure," she said, "there 's nothing you can do?"

"Just one thing," replied the little missionary. "I can clean my slate. And I 'm going to — right now. There 's a bit of my wrong side left. It 's in that box."

She slid the cover off, and took out a large object wrapped in many thicknesses of cloth. These she carefully unrolled, one by one. "No," she said, with a wistful note in her voice and a faint, sad smile,— "it is n't beautiful, but . . ." And she held up the treasure, slowly turning it around and around before Edith's startled eyes.

It was a curious piece of pottery — a Bactrian camel, perhaps fifteen inches in height, mounted on a fixed base of the same material. The strong shaggy body, the muscles of flank and leg, the spreading, pad-like feet, were there to the life. The long, sagging neck, fringed with hair, curved up to a head that was thrown back — the mouth open and angry, the eyes flashing. But the extraordinary fidelity of the modeling was even less striking than the rich, glassy, golden-brown color that paled to a creamy yellow on the two humps.

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"There's a bit of my wrong side left. It's in that box."

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If the image had lain, as was possible, for unnumbered centuries in a grave of Shansi or Shensi, it had somehow been protected from earthy incrustations.

Edith took it in her hands. . . . Oh, that color! Was it brown, after all; was there not a deep "biscuit" red under the glazed surface? It was warm. It glowed.

"Do you like it?" asked the little missionary, in a listless voice.

"Oh, my dear,—" there was a catch of sheer excitement in Edith's voice —"my dear, it is —" with a deliberate effort she controlled herself —"it is fascinating!"

"I want you to have it, then."

Edith could not trust herself at all now. She said nothing; merely looked at Rhoda Eavesby out of big, humid eyes. But she found no suspicion, no light, in the thin face; only that faint, sad smile. . . . She looked again at the camel. What *were* some of the distinguishing characteristics of those early dynastic periods — Sung, Yuan, T'ang, even the ancient Han? But she could only press her lips together again. "No false alarms," ran her thoughts. "Not a word until I *know!*"

"I 'm glad you like it," said the little missionary, and flitted back to her own room.

After dinner, when she felt sure that enough time had elapsed to remove any suspicion that she was building up a wild plan of action, Edith remarked:

"If you don't mind, Rhoda, dear, I will start early

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in the morning. Even if it clears up, the roads will be bad. I may need the extra time."

"I 'll order the litter around for six-thirty, if you say so," replied the missionary simply.

Edith did a moment's calculating; then nodded.

They went to bed early; but sleep was slow in quieting Miss Austin's racing mind. At midnight she was still propped up in bed writing in her diary. This was some relief.

"I feel like a burglar's apprentice," she wrote. "I 'm living at this minute every known kind of a lie. But I 'm sure it 's right. It must be. They 'd never let me do it if they knew. And then, this way, if I 'm all wrong about it, nobody will be hurt.

"There 's a train leaving for Chingting and Peking at seven-thirty to-morrow morning. On that train will be Miss Edith Austin, accompanied by a wicker suit-case, a square wooden box, and a very small dog. To-morrow night at this time I shall be in Peking — sleeping, maybe. And unless I 'm greatly mistaken, on the morning of day after to-morrow Mr. Heatherington's old porcelain merchant in the Ha Ta High Street will be transacting business with little me."

It was very romantic and satisfactory, early the next morning, to stand at the compound gate in the bright sunlight and watch the strange, gay little caravan coming up the muddy street from somewhere, surely, far-off in the Arabian Nights, to carry her away into the northern hills. The litter in which she was to ride

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was a big Sedan-chair suspended between two mules. It had a curving roof, and latticed windows in front and at the sides. It was covered with bright red and blue cloth. And, delight of delights! there were tinkly little bells on the saddles of the mules. Then there was a pack animal for her suit-case, a burro for Oldjohn, who was to act as her escort and dragoman, and two hardfaced muleteers. As she glanced demurely at these latter persons Edith thrilled with a delicious horror. Surely, between jobs, they were at least brigands.

She was seated now on cushions in her palanquin — Wing cuddled in her lap, the box (her secret) that was to save Shansi, beside her on the cushioned seat. The little missionary, who had insisted on slipping into a kimono and coming down, kissed her good-bye. She had blue rings under her eyes, and was white. It wrung Edith's heart to look at her. Mr. and Mrs. Harbison, who had breakfasted with her, shook hands cordially.

Oldjohn mounted his burro. The less villainous of the two muleteers raised his whip. Then Mr. Harbison, with a sudden recollection, stepped to the window of the litter.

"Why," he exclaimed, "I entirely forgot to tell you! I *am* sleepy. A message reached us just before midnight saying that not three hours after your train came through yesterday, five bridges went out along the railway, or were at least undermined. These soft loess hills are frightfully unstable, you know. It will surely be two or three weeks before they can get any

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trains through. It is fortunate that you are to be with your own relatives and under such special protection — for you are certainly marooned in Shansi. . . . Good-bye. A pleasant trip!"

The muleteers cracked their whips. The mules plunged forward. And the cavalcade swung off on its way to the northern hills, between gray walls of sun-dried bricks and low curving roofs of gray tile, and past early carts of merchandise that crowded close in the narrow way.

But of her surroundings Miss Austin saw nothing. Her heart had all but stopped beating. Her usually clear if unformed mind was groping in utter bewilderment.

No trains! No trains for two or three weeks! And Mr. Simon Blumstein, of the Blumstein-Wilberly group, moving directly (if with some necessary Oriental deliberation) toward a private but unassailably official settlement of the little misunderstanding over the Shansi mines. And she herself, with that precious wooden box, to be delivered over to her aunt and uncle before this day's sun should set — no escaping that now! — to sit by, rebuked, defeated, a mere saddened spectator of the quiet little climax to Rhoda Eavesby's life drama that had been, Chinese fashion, fifteen years in the playing.

But wait a minute! She sat up rigidly in the swaying car, clinging to the sides with tense hands. Was the railroad so necessary? Did n't the missionary people travel freely all over these interior provinces?

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Surely! And in the very sort of vehicle which was now hers to command. She sat thinking — thinking. She thought of the wrinkled Oldjohn back there astraddle of that absurd little burro with his toes trailing the mud of the street. He was responsible for her; he could not in any circumstances short of death itself evade that responsibility; but he was also a servant and must obey her. That, she knew well enough, was the Chinese of it. At the worst, it could take only a few extra days. There might yet be time. It would be a wild plunge into the unknown — *but there might yet be time!*

They were emerging from the city streets outside the wall into the open country of the Fen Ho Valley. She called to the older muleteer to stop. She had to call again, holding up her hand. He understood, and obeyed. Oldjohn came riding absurdly up to the window with a few extra and inquiring wrinkles on his brown face.

"No can go this side, Oldjohn," she said decisively. "Go other way. Go Chingting — Peking side. Savvy?"

Oldjohn's face went blank. His parchment eyelids fluttered. "Go Peking side!" he muttered; then shook his head energetically. "No can do! No can do!"

But Miss Austin knew her authority too well. She insisted.

Oldjohn tried to explain; but his shallow well of Pidgin-English ran dry. He stood mute before her,

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a brown-faced old Chinaman who stammered in sing-song. They had no provisions, no water. There was no folding cot for the lady; and what lady had ever traveled, anywhere, without a folding cot? Did she propose to rest her dainty person on the reproachable *kang* of the unspeakable Chinese inn? There was not so much as a change of clothing for himself. It was three days' travel by the highway, even to Pingting; and the roads would be impassable.

"Go back," he suggested with sinking heart. "Go back. See lady."

Miss Austin shook her head and frowned. She waved a small hand toward the hills of the east. "Peking side," she said calmly.

Oldjohn was beaten. Tremblingly he instructed the muleteers. There was sudden argument. Voices were raised. A crowd gathered and swelled the discussion. But Miss Austin simply waited. Finally they turned off on a side road. Oldjohn, muttering, dropped behind. They skirted the city, pausing once or twice while the three Chinese made a purchase of necessaries with Miss Austin's silver at a net profit to themselves of three hundred per cent.

They passed the series of forts and the twin pagodas. They climbed slowly, slowly, step by step, hour by hour, into the hills. They were in the sunken roads by noon, floundering along a muddy canyon, ten, twenty, forty feet beneath the cultivated plateaus of the hill-country. They passed camel trains bound for Mongolia, Kansuh, and Thibet, each beast on a string

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with a ring in its nose. They tangled themselves all but inextricably with mule pack-trains. and carts. Long files of donkeys passed, carrying lump coal in woven panniers. They forded swollen rivulets and slipped excitingly on the brink of more than one precipice.

There were quarrels and arguments in the road. There were villages in which naked children and "chow" dogs played and snarled in swarms. There were ragged crowds of riper years that crowded close and shouted at the bold, beautiful white woman who exhibited herself shamefully without escort in an open litter. At times the girl's expressive hazel eyes rang the changes from calm to almost unbearable excitement, from trembling timidity to hearty, wholesome American anger.

But there were moments when she caught whiffs of pear and apple and cherry trees in bloom. There were glimpses of imposing buildings within compounds and surrounded by trees — the only trees in all these bare, terraced, brown hills. Then there were the roadside vendors of cakes and soups and bitter, pulpy fruit, hastening back to their trade in numbers that matched those of the old days before the railway had soaked up the bulk of the traffic. But railway or no railway, this was still the ancient Peking-Thibet Road, where innumerable camels and mules still churned the mud and ground up the caking dust and helped the vitalest highway of all time to eat its way deeper and deeper down below the fruitful plateaus. And at intervals

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all day long, while this fascinating pageant of Old Testament life and times was impressing itself with bewildering variety on the quick negative of Edith's young mind, the younger of the muleteers sang, as he plodded along the road or swung himself up to the back of the nearest pack animal, a quavering endless melody. Edith wondered, glancing timidly out at his villainous face, if he were singing of love.

At about seven in the evening they entered the square gateway of a village inn, and waited in the court-yard. Behind them, shutting off the road, were the innkeeper's house and the solid wooden gates that had closed after them. On the right was a row of cell-like rooms with big windows of paper squares; on the left the low stable wall, over which peered mules and donkeys; directly ahead, closing off the farther end of the compound, stood a higher, rather more pretentious structure reached by a short flight of stone steps. This, she gathered from the gesticulating of Oldjohn and the innkeeper, was to be her abode for the night. Tattered coolies lounged about, studying the beautiful foreign woman with insolent eyes. In one corner a little girl was trudging round and round a primitive stone mill, grinding out the morrow's supply of flour. In another corner an itinerant barber had set down his stool and tripod, and was at the moment deftly scraping the inner side of a young man's eyelid.

Edith wanted to rub her eyes. Here she was, suddenly set down in the midst of actual Chinese life,

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with everything going on naturally and simply as it had gone on for thousands of years. From one of the cells on her right came a haunting minor melody of the Orient played on some sort of reed instrument. "Like the queer wooden things they have in orchestras," she told herself. At the doorway of another cell appeared a slim, calm young Chinaman in a blue gown, eating rice from a blue-and-white bowl with chopsticks. "Why, he's positively goodlooking!" thought Edith.

Oldjohn appeared now beside her car. With some prodding and much chatter the bearer-mules were brought to the ground. Miss Austin stooped low and stepped out through the window of the litter; and Oldjohn, with much shaking of the head, escorted her up the steps of the building at the end of the court.

When Edith found herself actually within the structure, and took in the grimy woodwork, the aged, crumbling plaster, the heaps of dirt in the corners, the single bent-wood chair and primitive table, and the brick platform at one end, covered with a square of dirty matting, that was clearly the *kang* or bed, the excited shine left her eyes and her face blanched. A charcoal brazier, set in a corner, filled the apartment with its fumes. For a moment she steadied herself against the slippery old chair and sniffed the musty, suffocating atmosphere. "It *is* pretty bad," she thought. But Oldjohn was watching her; still unconsciously shaking his head; and she collected herself.

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For food that evening she had only rice, eggs, and tea, prepared by Oldjohn's hand. She was thirsty; but the local water, she knew, like the vegetables, might easily mean death.

She was tired from travel, and still more from excitement. The eleven hours of swinging and jolting in the litter had left her with an ache for every bone. But she could not look at the brick bed and its brown matting without a sinking of the heart. She dropped into the uncomfortable chair to think. Then, with a sudden rush of timidity, she tried to fasten the door, which hung loosely by one leather hinge. There had once been a latch; but, like all China, it had fallen into decay. By exerting all her strength and stopping occasionally to rest, she contrived to move the table over against it.

She returned to the slippery chair. The evening wore slowly on. She fell to dozing off, but was awakened over and over again by the mysterious stirrings and crunchings of the animals in the open stable, or by the banging of the watchman's gong as he made his frequent rounds to frighten robbers away.

She had strange thoughts and stranger dreams. Her mind seemed to be escaping all normal bounds. She even found herself wondering if this quaint old land was not, after all, the only world she had ever known, if she herself was not a part of it, if that other region of white folk and paved streets and comfortable houses in elm-shaded streets and schools and parties and pretty frocks and nice boys who took you auto-

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mobiling — if all this was not a dream, or perhaps something she had read in a book.

What if the robbers *should* come! Rhoda had said that the Province was still overrun with them. How about the hundred and eighty whites that had been killed within the Province not a dozen years ago? And what were the hideous faces that came into her dream-vision — brown faces, with horrible mouths and slanting, squinting eyes? . . . It was all so strange.

"Like going into another star," she thought, once when the faces had frightened her awake. "That 's it — like being on another star. A different kind of people; a different kind of life. You could never tell them at home. You could n't compare it with anything they know about. You could n't make them see it."

Then, half sick with the poisonous air, she got up and thrust her small fist through every one of the paper squares that she could reach, put her face close to one of the openings, and breathed the sweet spring air deep into her lungs.

Outside, the moon was shining, just as she had so often seen it shine at home. The court-yard was bathed in the pale light. Now that she could see it all, it seemed very quiet, very peaceful. Even the stirring and crunching of the animals took on a friendly sound. And she went back to her chair and to a sort of slumber, her untrained young imagination stirred by the age-old mystery of the East — of the

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peaceable-bloodthirsty, silent-noisy, hideous-beautiful East.

There were telegraph wires extending in various directions through Shansi Province. One of these wires, that leading from T'ai Yuan to Chief Engineer Greene's compound in the Northern hills was humming and singing at intervals throughout that night.

For Miss Edith Austin, attended only by an aged Chinese servant and two unknown muleteers, had, while on her way north from T'ai Yuan, disappeared off the face of the earth. At about two hours after midnight the first search-party, in charge of Mr. Greene himself, struck south to rouse every village on the T'ai Yuan road. Within an hour two other parties, in charge of young instrument-men, had left to scour the hills, each carrying a trustworthy interpreter and a week's rations on pack animals. At five, the tired, patient, overworked Mr. Harbison started north, with his own servant and an escort of twelve turbanned soldiers from the Yamen of the Provincial Judge. In his pocket burned and sizzled a long message from Mr. Wilberly in which that sometimes irascible business man had minced no words in expressing his complete opinion of one particular missionary for sending off Miss Edith Austin alone, quite as if she were one of those young missionary women.

By six o'clock in the morning the Provincial Judge, the Treasurer, and the Governor himself were assembled in the Governor's council room to discuss

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measures. For the killing of foreigners had come to be an expensive luxury. The resulting indemnities, in a tax-ridden, revolution-despoiled, utterly prostrated Province, could only come out of the private "squeeze" of these three eminent officials and the lesser ones under their control. More, there was to be considered the delicate nature of those pending negotiations to which the unfortunate young person's uncle, this Wilberly, was a party, and in which "good feeling" and "sympathetic understanding" were considerable factors. Hence the early rising and, beneath the outer dignity and suavity demanded by official etiquette on all occasions, the inner perturbation.

And all night Mrs. Wilberly lay querulous, moaning even, on her bed, while her fat husband walked the floor, ran excitedly outside to hurry up the searching parties, walked the floor again.

Breakfast was not cold before Peking mysteriously knew the story. The New York Herald man instantly bought an exclusive right to the Shansi wires from an obliging official, who promptly sold the same privilege to the Associated Press and to one or two Middle Western papers. The A. P. man, suspecting this duplicity as a matter of course, sent his assistant to the temporary end of the railway at Pingting, with instructions to use his judgment on the field. And this last person, eagerly taken in by three lonely young engineers of the North China Development Company (Simon Blumstein, Managing Director)

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resident at that point, entertained them with tales of the beauty and charm of the American girl whose tragic disappearance had set the civilized world ablaze. "It's a bigger story than the Rais Uli thing in Morocco; or the American woman that was held for ransom near Salonika. You see, this Miss Austin is a beauty — and popular. A reg'lar nice girl, from home."

It was late on the second day following the appearance of the A. P. man at Pingting that the youngest of the three resident engineers was riding his Manchu pony at an easy canter toward the village. He was a pleasant-appearing Texan of twenty-five or so. He wore a broad-brimmed Stetson hat, a corduroy coat; and knee-high, tight-fitting engineer's boots were laced up over the legs of his trousers. A small Boston bull trotted at the pony's heels.

The Manchu pony sidled around a tangle of carts; then shied away from a group of resting camels. The act caused him to brush against a red-and-blue mule litter, that had been just ahead.

"Here, Singsing," said the engineer,—"what are you trying to do? Behave yourself!"

There was a rustle and a sort of gasp within the litter. A very pleasing voice cried, "Oh!" The latticed window swung open and a face appeared — the exceedingly attractive face of a girl of twenty or twenty-one, rather pale and forlorn, but with pretty hazel eyes and the beginnings of a shy, startled smile.

The young engineer stared for a moment in utter

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confusion. Then he removed his broad gray hat, and blushed.

The girl smiled freely now, and brightly. Never in her life had she seen so complete, so thorough-going a blush as that.

"You — you 're Miss Austin!" he breathed.

"Why, yes, that 's my name," she replied; "but how on earth did you know?"

He looked at her in a sort of stupid amazement. "How did I know?" he repeated after her. "Everybody in the world has been looking for you for three days."

"No — really!" Her brows puckered. "That Rhoda Eavesby must have told," she mused. "But no, she would n't." Then suddenly she shut her lips tight, and glanced down, rather anxiously, at a square, wooden box by her side. "Perhaps you 'll be good enough to show me where the best inn is," she said. "In those other villages I 'm sure I had the worst."

"I will — gladly," he replied; and directed the muleteers toward the compound of the engineers farther up the hill.

"And, oh," she cried, catching sight of the bulldog and suddenly remembering, "*do* you suppose there 's such a thing as a dog-biscuit to be had? I 've had to feed poor Wing on most any old thing."

There was an hour of bustle and confusion in the compound on the hill; then Miss Austin found herself in complete possession of a small house, with a devoted and ancient Chinese woman to wait on her. Dinner

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"Everybody in the world has been looking for you for three days."

was brought in by Oldjohn — a curry of chicken, real potatoes, canned peas, canned butter, and coffee — actually coffee!

It was not until she had insisted with some vehemence that she really was n't tired that the four young Americans, who were so delightfully like nice boys from home, permitted her to join them in the living-

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room, and talk about things back in the States, and listen to Sousa and Harry Lauder and Blanche Ring on the talking-machine.

The A. P. man accompanied her to Peking the next morning. He offered to carry the wooden box that she handled with such care, but she shook her head and gave him Wing instead.

He tried at times during the journey to ask a few leading questions. It *was* a bit difficult to understand why she had taken that extraordinary journey alone instead of joining her uncle and aunt in the hills, as had been planned. But always when he had led nicely up to the subject she would turn her big, demure eyes on him and innocently explain that she had gone out because Miss Eavesby was ill, and had never intended anything but coming directly back. There had evidently been a misunderstanding somewhere. Of course, if she had realized how much of a journey it was . . . Still, she could n't for the life of her see why everybody was making such a tremendous fuss. The missionary girls go everywhere alone.

As they said good-bye, at the entrance to the Peking hotel, the A. P. man looked thoughtfully at her. She was carrying that box herself, and it looked rather heavy. Wing had been turned over, with the wicker suit-case, to a hotel boy. " There 's a story here somewhere," he told himself, " a wonderful story. But —" he glanced at the long straight nose and the odd, firm set to the pretty chin —" nobody will ever get it. Not ever."

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It was just after tea-time in the big hotel. Miss Austin hurried through the "lounge" without stopping to speak to any of the acquaintances who looked up at her with startled eyes as she passed. The Oldhams were in a far corner, but she made a point of not seeing them. Mr. Henry Carpenter, the lanky, shrewd-faced cutch-buyer of Chicago and Borneo, was sitting comfortably back in a big chair, deep in the columns of the *Tientsin Critic*. She returned his friendly smile with a bright little jerk of her head, hesitated a moment as if designing to speak to him, then hurried on to her own room. She liked Mr. Carpenter. Perhaps he would help her.

Once in her room she tore off her gloves, picked up a certain quarto work on Chinese Porcelains, and swiftly turned the pages. One of the colored plates arrested her attention. She studied it closely. Then she got the precious parcel from its box, removed the wrappings, propped the book open on the table, and stood the camel beside the colored plate. Unmistakably, the image and the picture were identical.

She hastily pencilled a chit to Henry Carpenter:

Please come out into the corridor, away from the crowd. I want to see you. Very important. Edith Austin.

Then, and not until then, did she take a few simple measures to make herself presentable after her journey.

Mr. Carpenter was waiting outside her door when

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she opened it. Without a word she handed him the camel.

He turned it slowly around in his hands, held it up to the light, studied modeling and color, examined the base for marks; then lowered it and softly whistled.

"Isn't it wonderful!" she breathed, in an excited whisper. "It's a Han piece. I've looked it up."

"It certainly appears to be — possibly of the Han time, certainly not later than the T'ang. It is in perfect condition." He fingered it gently, studying the undertones of the color with the loving gaze of a connoisseur; then raised his eyes to hers. "It wouldn't surprise me, Miss Austin, to learn that it is the most beautiful very old piece in the world."

"I've got to sell it, Mr. Carpenter. How much do you think it will bring?"

He knit his brows. "Almost any amount. It is a perfect specimen. And it is — let me see! — fifteen hundred to two thousand years old. At speculative Fifth Avenue prices . . ." He pursed his lips, calculating.

"Now listen," said Miss Austin. "Will you do this for me — will you take it over to that merchant in the Ha Ta High Street and make him buy it — right now? There's simply no time to lose. I wouldn't ask you, only — only — it's really very important."

"Of course," said he thoughtfully, "you won't begin to get your price if you try to hurry it."

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"Is n't it wonderful!" she breathed, in an excited whisper. "It 's a Han piece."

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She shook her head. "I can't wait. If you can get from five to eight hundred dollars, gold, take it."

"But the thing is worth —"

"I know it, Mr. Carpenter, but please hurry!" She suddenly smiled, and looked up at him with an excited twinkle in her eyes. "Is n't it dreadful the way I 'm ordering you around!"

His face expanded in a lean grin. "Now wait — let 's think a minute," said he. "I don't believe that fellow will pay cash. He 'll want to sell it on commission. I 'll tell you what! I 'll underwrite it up to, say, eight hundred. Then we 'll let him sell it for what he can later, take out his commission, repay me, and hand you whatever extra there may be. That way, you can have the eight hundred to-night. And — wait, don't object! It 's the safest kind of a speculation for me. If I were buying porcelains, I 'd gladly pay a thousand cash for it, as a pure investment."

Accordingly, the very next morning Miss Austin sent Oldjohn back to T'ai Yuan, bearing a Chinese draft for eight hundred dollars (less ten per cent. to the Chinese bankers).

Then she waited. Telegrams passed between her uncle and herself, but these were explanatory and personal; none related to the business affairs of the North China Development Company. Days slipped by — a week — nearly two weeks. Then, one morning, Miss Austin picked up a copy of the China *Critic* at the

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desk, and hit upon the following item, tucked away near the bottom of an inside page:

Mr. Simon Blumstein and party are reported as about to return from T'ai Yuan Fu, where they have been inspecting the properties of the Company. At the Tientsin office it was said yesterday that a mass-meeting of the so-called "Gentry and People" of Shansi was held a day earlier at the Provincial capital, at which was developed so much fanatical opposition to the Company that Mr. Blumstein considers it unwise to press the work at the present time.

That evening Mr. and Mrs. Wilberly were back, sitting at the table with their niece and the Oldhams quite as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

"My dear child,"— this from Mrs. Wilberly, the next day at tiffin —"you 've no idea, all we 've been through! You did frighten me almost to death. And your uncle feels very badly about it, Edith."

Miss Austin looked up in some surprise. "Uncle does. Why?"

"Oh, he thinks that you were hurt by what he said to you, that last evening here, just before we went away. He feels that is why you made that frightful journey back, after you took your sick missionary out there, instead of coming straight to us, as you should have."

Miss Austin poised her coffee cup in air, and looked inscrutably across it at her aunt.

"How does Uncle Frank feel about the failure of his business plans?" she asked.

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"Oh, more relieved than anything else. Glad to be out of it. He says this is no country for a plain American. The Chinese are too subtle, too — what was the word? — too 'devious' in their methods. He said only this morning that as a business-man he has sense enough to know when he 's beaten and it 's time to cut losses. And now that he has learned his lesson, he is prepared to start back home and feel contented about it. I 'm so glad. I 'm tired to death of living in a trunk. . . . I do wish you would try to be nice to your uncle, Edith. It would make him more —" She did not finish.

There are but two brief episodes to set down here. They seem pertinent.

Directly after tiffin Miss Austin observed Mr. Carpenter standing near the hotel-office, with his hands in his pockets and the faintest suspicion of a smile on his lean, shrewd face. Surmising that he was waiting for herself, she moved casually toward him.

He glanced about to make sure that they were not observed; then said, very quietly:

"Please look unconcerned at what I 'm going to tell you. The camel is sold. I can't find out what it brought — the old merchant won't give up any information about the size of his commission. But he admits a thousand net on our account. That 's eight hundred for me, and two hundred for you. Some kind friend has unwittingly financed your campaign for you. Here is yours — forty-one English sover-

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eigns and some silver." And he slipped a heavy little bag into her hand.

The second episode was as follows:

Late on this same afternoon Mr. Wilberly appeared about the hotel in jocular mood. Edith found him looking at her knowingly, and constantly fighting back a mysterious smile. She began to wonder a little.

When she and Mrs. Wilberly were seated at the dinner-table, he excused himself to go on an unexplained errand. On returning, he was rather self-conscious.

He was hovering near, later, when she said good-night. He even walked down the corridor with her, and lingered at her door. Finally he broke out:

"You 'll find a little package in your room, Edith. It is n't much. You 'll laugh — I fell for Heatherington's merchant after all. But he assures me that *this* piece is not one of Heatherington's, that it has never been out of the country. And that 's one thing, you know, you can take the word of a responsible Chinese merchant. The Chinese *are* truthful."

There was a square wooden box on the table. Edith opened it, and took out a thick bundle of soft cloths. As she stripped them off, the lumpy object within felt familiar in her hands. She hesitated. But her uncle was waiting there in the doorway for his thanks. She took off another of the cloths. There was a pounding in her temples. She wanted to laugh, to cry, to scream.

But outwardly she presented a quiet, very charming

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picture of girlhood — graceful and slim in her light evening gown, Rhoda Eavesby's wistaria scarf about her shoulders, her arms bare and white, her oval face slightly flushed. She stripped off the last cloth; and

"Yes," she mused weakly, "the Chinese *are* truthful."

there it lay in her hand — her own golden-brown camel, Rhoda Eavesby's camel, the —

Her uncle was speaking eagerly, from the doorway.

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"It 's a genuine Han piece. Very fine specimen. There probably is n't another such perfect piece in the known world — certainly not outside the British Museum."

When she had thanked him as well as she could and he had gone and the door was shut, she dropped weakly on the couch and gazed at the lustrous bit of pottery.

"Yes," she mused weakly, "the Chinese *are* truthful. . . . And life, take it one way and another, is mixed."

After which profoundly philosophical observation, she soberly undressed and went to bed, with the quarto work on Porcelains propped against her knees, and Wing cuddled close where he could from time to time lick her hand.

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VII

WILLIAM OF EAST ORANGE

LITTLE Wing crawled from his basket on the end of the berth, shook himself, leaped silently to the floor of the compartment, and, with a timid glance at his mistress, cocked his very small and very silky head on one side and set forth to see the world, via the open door and the corridor beyond it.

Miss Austin sat curled up on the other end of the berth, following with dreamy eyes the quaint walled villages, the innumerable grave mounds in the little checkerboard fields, and the roadside strings of camels and donkeys that drifted slowly by the car window. Behind and beyond stretched the flat yellow-brown expanse that is known as the Great Plain of China.

She raised her novel as if to read; then lowered it, and sighed. It was rather forlorn business, this dusty thirty-hour journey, with not a soul you knew at the other end of it. She almost wished she had let the white-haired woman from Buffalo go on asking questions at tiffin in the dining-car. Still, those questions *had* verged on the personal. . . . Then there was the man with the big shoulders and the glass eye who had

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spoken to her. His voice was curiously low and grave, and he had a rather unusual air of rigid self-control. He was a suppressed man; he whispered. And he always turned his head carefully with his eyes.

She glanced around.

"Why, Wing," she breathed, glancing at the empty basket,—"What 's this! Where are you?"

She looked out into the narrow corridor. He was not in sight. She went to the door at the nearer end of the car, past two closed compartments. The door was shut. She returned and went to the farther door. That, too, was shut. And all the compartments between were closed except one. She paused by the door of that one. The curtains were drawn and it was dark; but it appeared to be empty.

A minute object stirred on the floor at the farther end. She darted in, dove to her knees, and fished the dog out from under a folded camp-chair. Then she sank back on her heels in sudden and complete confusion — for a man was lying on the berth and was staring at her. He raised himself to his elbow and continued staring. Their faces, his and hers, were not more than a foot or two apart. His eyes were big, and a thought wild, and, now that she was growing accustomed to the dim light, distinctly bloodshot. He was a young man, too; twenty-three or four, perhaps; and nice-looking; just the sort of boy one was likely to sit out on the front porch with, back home, or go to parties with. His figure was slim under the bathrobe he wore.

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"I — I 'm sorry," she found herself saying. "I did n't know. You see, my dog —"

"Oh," said he, with a jerky wave of his hand, "it 's all right. Only I was kind of startled."

"Of course," said she, getting to her feet and cuddling the little dog against her chin.

A man was lying on the berth and was staring at her.

She looked more closely at him. He had fine, even delicate features, and a high, nicely-modeled forehead that curved back under his wavy hair; and his cheeks and forehead were flushed.

"You look as if you had a fever," she observed unexpectedly, in a direct, practical tone. "Are you ill?"

He hesitated. His eyelids fluttered a little. Then

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suddenly he gathered his bathrobe about him and swung around to a sitting posture. The movement was so quick and nervous that it made Edith start.

"What if I am?" he broke out petulantly. "What earthly difference does it make! It 's a matter of only a few hours, anyway. All I 'm asking now is to be let alone!"

Edith, hugging Wing tight, slipped out of the compartment and back to her own.

Ten minutes later she was conscious of a shadow across the doorway, and looked up. There he stood, fully clad now; still flushed and still with that odd over-intensity of expression about the eyes. But he was certainly a nice boy, of the sort that you see all too seldom on the Coast.

"May I come in?" he asked.

She moved her coat and set Wing's basket on the floor. He promptly sank down beside her on the long seat.

"There is n't really much sense in my hurrying after you in this way," said he, listlessly. "Whatever happens, it will be all the same," he looked at his watch, "seven hours from now. But I was rude."

"Yes," she replied, "you were. But then, it was —"

He interrupted her with a wave of his hand. "You 're going to say it was your fault to begin with. You know it was n't. I wish you would n't waste time being polite. Just be honest. Nobody is. You 're not. I 'm not. But after all, why should n't we be?

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I 'll be honest right now. I have n't the remotest idea why I scrambled into my clothes and came here." He pondered. " Maybe it was because you surprised me so. You 're pretty as the Dickens. And I can see that you 're a nice sort of girl. Like home-folks. I 'm from East Orange — you know, in New Jersey."

" Yes, I know," murmured Miss Austin, conscious of some confusion of mind.

" At first I thought you were a dream," he ran on. " Then when you were n't, but a regular girl, I just had the impulse to come and talk to you a little while. Do you mind? "

" Why, not at all," replied Miss Austin.

He looked again at his watch. " I won't bother you long — have n't really any time to waste. The reason I decided on ten o'clock to-night instead of this afternoon was to allow for the letters I 've got to write. And there did n't seem to be any good reason why I should n't eat dinner. It 's funny. At a time like this you seem to have an almost uncanny sense of order. You get quiet and systematic."

It occurred to Edith that he appeared anything but systematic. And what on earth was he talking about? He had not looked at her since he sat down; his eyes were fixed on the wooden wall of the compartment. He made her fidgety. She took Wing from his basket and cuddled him in her arms.

" Have you any stamps? " he asked, unexpectedly.

At this she turned and looked full at him; but he

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did not so much as raise his eyes. Finally she managed to say:

"Only American ones."

"They 'll do. Maybe you 'd be willing to take care of my letters to-night. You can mail them in Shanghai, at the American Post Office. Or right at the Astor House, for that matter. *Would* you mind?"

"Why, no, of course not, but —"

Her voice faltered. But he, in his burning egoism, was quite unconscious of the fact. He had his watch out for the third time, and was unscrewing the back of the case. She watched him, sidelong, holding the little dog close to her face and looking down over the tangled, silky hair.

The lid removed, he held it up and looked at it. Pasted within it was a snapshot photograph of a girl — just a laughing face, the hair tumbling about it, the eyes squinting a bit in the glaring sun. It was the sort of picture that might have been snapped on a tennis-court or at the wheel of a motor-boat. Across the forehead was written, "To Billy," followed by three small circles made with the pen.

"It was out at Hopatcong," he said, "just two years ago this spring. She 's smiling. Been smiling at me this way for two years. She said maybe it would help me to fight for her." He handed it to her, taking her interest wholly for granted. "We were to have been married. This summer. I 'm supposed to be starting back now."

He fell into a silence, staring at that spot on the

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"We were to have been married. This summer."

wooden wall. Miss Austin, whose confusion of mind was settling into a queer sort of embarrassment, looked at the picture, then silently returned it.

She stole another sidelong glance at the boy. It

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was a sensitive face. The skin was light in color and unusually fine in texture. He did n't look like the China Coast, where toughness of fiber is the first great requisite in the man who must weave his little strand of life through that bizarre, many-colored fabric.

He was talking again; in that monotonous, slightly husky voice.

"I should n't have come. But then, back there it looked like the big chance. I did n't know. I *could n't* know — either the Coast or myself. You see, my job would n't support us. And this one, with the New York & Shanghai Export Company — why, I could save a thousand dollars in the two years on my salary alone. And my transportation paid. And then a desk in the New York office. And I was to go out in the world and fight it and lick it, and win a place for her — her William of Orange, she called me. And now — oh, God!"

At this point, to Miss Austin's further surprise and concern, he broke down, dropped his head on his hands and sobbed. She leaned back on her corner and looked at him, feeling suddenly cold and composed. She had never before happened to see a man cry. She was glad he did it so quietly.

It occurred to her that people might be passing in the corridor. It would look awkward. Should she ask him to go, or — close the door. She got up, in a matter-of-fact way, stepped around him, and closed the door.

"I ought to be kicked," he said, after a time, "com-

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ing in here and bothering you with this. I'd have been all right if I had n't seen you. But having you appear in that queer way, like a dream, it made me think of . . . And of course it 's no use pretending I 'm myself to-day. I 'm not. Thank God, in a few hours "— he consulted his watch again —" six hours, thirty-nine minutes — I won't be anybody."

Miss Austin was still leaning back in her corner by the window, still looking intently at him. " Why won't you be anybody? " she asked. " What are you going to do? "

He hesitated only a moment; then replied with a little outburst of relief: — " I 'm going to kill myself."

" At ten o'clock to-night? "

He nodded.

" You don't think it 's foolish? "

He shook his head.

" Or cowardly? "

" No, it 's kind."

" Why? How? I don't understand that? "

" I suppose a girl would n't. You 'd have to know the whole story to judge it fairly. And you could n't know the whole story without knowing a lot of things a decent girl can't possibly know."

Edith almost said, with some little impatience, " I know more than you think." But she did n't say it. Instead she compressed her lips and looked at his profile without a word. Here it was again, the lie about life; the pretence that woman is made of dif-

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ferent stuff from man; the fencing off of a privileged woman class from that arena in which man's character is either made or broken, from the arena that *is* life! Even this broken boy, on the brink of suicide, clung instinctively to the old tradition. "It 's what makes every honest woman lie to everybody, every minute, just to keep her place as an honest woman," reflected Edith.

"Why did you say it would be kind?" she asked.

"Well,— here." For the first time he raised his head and looked squarely at her. She liked his eyes. "You 've heard of men going all to pieces. Well, that 's what I 've done. There 's no getting back of it. And it 's my own fault. The Coast was too much for me — I just did n't have the character."

His manner was that of one who is explaining gloomily but patiently a difficult problem. His huskiness increased, and he had to pause every now and then to clear his throat.

"There 's no public opinion on the Coast, you know. White people run down awful fast, out here. And if you 're supposed to live among them and do business with them, you can't be a prig. You 've got to go the pace with 'em. You 've got to. And you do. There just is n't anything to keep you from it. It 's all queer — everything you believe sort o' goes to pieces on you in your first six months. Why, marriage always meant something to me — it was beautiful, sacred." He gave a bitter little laugh. "But it was a married woman. . . ."

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He stopped short, flushed, and dropped his eyes. "Of course," he went on, "that was after I 'd begun drinking. And then I did n't care. Something was broken. My faith, I guess. I was gone then. Drinking and gambling. I had a notion of winning back a little of the money — our savings! — I had spent and lost. I did worse things, too. It 's a rotten world, I tell you. All these men keep up a wonderful bluff before nice women, but they 're vile. I 'm vile. That 's the worst of it. I 'm vile. They did n't do it to me. It was right in me from the start. I 'm so bad I have no business to be sitting here talking to you. I 'm ashamed of myself for coming here and talking like this. Why "— he shivered and covered his face for a moment —" I did n't dream that I *could* tell such things to a nice girl! It just shows what — I 've — come — to."

"You were going to tell me why it would be kind to kill yourself," said Edith.

He glanced up, with a sort of impatience, then resumed the thread of his explanation.

"Supposing I had n't come out to the Coast," he said. "Supposing I had scraped together an income and got married, just as I was — she loving me — I thinking I was a fairly average sort of young fellow. Then, some day when I was put to the test, it would have come out. I would know, she would know, that I 'm bad. It would be too late. This way is better, having the test first."

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"But why kill yourself?" persisted Edith. "Why not just break the engagement?"

"I'd have to give her a reason. No, I won't lie to her about this. And I *can't* tell her the truth. Besides, I tell you, I'm through. I'll never be any use again. This way, killing myself, I look on it as a surgical operation. It will hurt her, but it will remove the cause of a lifetime of trouble."

Miss Austin let her eyes rove out to the passing landscape. After a moment she became aware that he was still talking.

"Just to show you what a fool I am, I tried to-day to win back some of that money. I had a hundred and seventy dollars, about, gold. It was the last. I seemed to feel, when we left Peking this morning, that if I could make a killing somehow on this trip, if I could just go home with *something* of what I was supposed to have saved, why maybe I could figure out some way of facing her. It was silly, of course. But I was half-crazy, and I tried it."

"How?"

"Why, Tex Connor's on the train, with his side-partner, the Manilla Kid."

"I don't know Tex Connor."

"Surely you've heard of him, the big Shanghai gambler. Great, was n't it — me going up against a game like that. But something inside just drove me to it. It was old-fashioned poker. It took Connor and the Kid just one hour and forty minutes to clean

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me out. There were two other passengers in on it; he cleaned them out, too. And then he had the nerve to offer me a little back for meals and tips. Oh, it 's amusing."

"Did he get *all* you had?"

"All but a few Mexican dollars in another suit, that I had forgotten. I 'm going to spend those in the dining-car to-night. Funny you don't know about Connor. Big man. Whispers at you. Glass eye."

Miss Austin's eyes brightened. She started to speak, but pressed a slim finger against her lips instead. Then she glanced at her bracelet-watch.

"It is getting on in the afternoon," she said. "I think you 'd better go and write those letters."

He looked up at her in some surprise.

"Be sure to give them to me," she went on, an extraordinarily practical little person to his gloomy eyes.

"Oh, I 'll give them to you."

"Because I want to see you again and have a good-bye chin-chin before you kill yourself."

He sat motionless at this, and looked at the wall. Then, slowly, he got up. He hesitated; opened the door; hesitated again, hand on knob; closed the door; opened it again, and went out.

Miss Austin picked up her novel and strolled forward into the dining-car.

On the Peking-Hankow Express the diner is used, between meals and of an evening, as a club car. It was tea-time now, and nearly all the tables had their quota of tourists. In fact, Miss Austin, standing, a

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slim, girlish figure, in the doorway, could see but four vacant chairs. Two of these were at the table otherwise occupied by the white-haired woman from Buffalo who asked questions, and her husband. The third was at one of the single tables, opposite a very military German in citizen's clothes; the only remaining one, farther down the car, was also at a single table. The other of the two chairs at this last table was occupied by a man with big shoulders. They had a familiar look, those shoulders.

She moved slowly along the aisle, squeezing past the bustling Chinese waiters. The white-haired woman smiled at her; but Miss Austin, deliberately failing to see the beginnings of an invitation to sit with this couple, passed demurely on. The German officer glanced up, started, and would have sprung to his feet; but could not catch her eye. Slowly, as if quite innocently looking for a seat, the girl moved on past the big shoulders, nearly to the end of the car; then turned.

Her eyes slowly dropped to a point just above and midway of the big shoulders. The head above the shoulders turned, and two eyes, one good, the other glass, met hers. The faintest of smiles touched her girlishly immobile face.

The big man glanced back, noted the crowded condition of the car, met the eager eyes of the German for one flashing instant, then rose.

"Sit here," he said, almost in a whisper.

She smiled again, still faintly; and hesitated. A

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momentary little blush crept into her face, and out again.

"It's all right," said he. "I'll have my tea brought to one of those other tables."

She slipped into the chair he held, and glanced up. "You need n't go," she said.

"Very dusty this time o' year," he murmured, when he had seated himself across the table.

"Dreadfully," she replied.

His tea was brought; and, shortly afterward, hers.

"I don't seem able to get used to seeing men take their tea," she ventured. "It always makes me think of cats and knitting."

He smiled. "I don't drink anything stronger."

"Oh," murmured Miss Austin, frankly surprised, —"you don't?"

Behind her, down the car, a white-haired woman from Buffalo was looking at her with a sudden hardening of the facial muscles. A fact of which Miss Austin was unconscious. She slowly lowered her teacup, and for a little time looked out the window with knit brows. And the one good eye of the big man studied her out of an expressionless face.

She turned and leaned forward on the table.

"I think I'd better tell you, Mr. Connor," she said, "that I came in here to find you."

At the sound of his name, a fleeting, barely perceptible expression of surprise came to the gambler's face. He bent forward, receptively.

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"You know the boy that played poker with you this morning . . ."

Mr. Connor stiffened up and looked away.

". . . well, I've been talking to him. He's — I think he's going to kill himself. I want to do something about it."

"The boy that played poker with you this morning . . . I think he's going to kill himself."

Mr. Connor flashed his good eye on her so swiftly that he quite forgot to turn his head with it. The glass eye continued innocently staring out the window at the Chinese countryside. Miss Austin suppressed an impulse to smile.

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"Friend o' yours?" he asked, with an edge on his voice.

She shook her head. "I never saw him before. But I don't want him to do that."

"How can you stop it?"

"I want you to play him again and let him win it back."

Mr. Connor sank abruptly back in his chair. He continued looking at her for a moment; then moved his eyes downward to the table. He took a piece of toast from the rack, broke off six small pieces of crust, and carefully placed them in a straight line across the table. Finally the eyes came up again.

"He won't do it," said Tex Connor, impassively.

"If *he* will, will *you?*" she asked eagerly.

"Yes," replied the gambler.

Miss Austin drank the last of her tea, and set down the cup. To Mr. Tex Connor she gave an open and unself-conscious smile.

"Thank you," she said. And picking up her book she went back through the crowded car, a little flushed with the excitement of her task. The German's eyes followed her until she disappeared. The white-haired woman compressed her lips, then whispered to her husband. Other passengers turned as she moved by. But of this little stir the girl knew nothing.

A thin young man in a checked suit, an American, with a bronzed, heavily lined face, rose from the extra seat at the German's table, into which he had dropped a moment before, and took the chair Miss Austin had

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vacated. His glance flitted furtively once or twice to the big man's face. Finally he caught the good eye, and winked.

"You 're all right, Tex," he said. "Some squab!"

"Cut it out, Kid!" said Connor.

The hands of Miss Austin's bracelet watch had crept around to eight o'clock. It was past dinner-time. William of Orange had not appeared. "This is getting unbearable," she mused, putting down her book. "I don't know a word of what I 've been reading."

She went down the corridor to the other compartment and knocked on the closed door. She had to knock again before he opened. He was in his shirt sleeves, his hair disheveled, his face white. She had never seen anybody look so tired as he looked at that moment. The berth and floor were littered with papers.

"Come in, if you want to," he said, not uncivilly.

She did so, and closed the door. "Have you written the letters?" she asked.

"All but one."

"Give them to me."

"They are n't addressed. Wait." He busied himself with fountain-pen and envelopes. "Here are three. Perhaps I 'd better do the other after dinner. It 's to my mother." He drew the back of his hand across his forehead. "I don't seem to be able to say what I mean. My head is n't working very well." He indicated the scattered and crumpled papers.

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"I 've sent my will to — her. It is n't witnessed; but shucks, I 've nothing to give anybody but a few keepsakes. And I 'm going to leave a note for the Consul-General at Hankow about my baggage — pin it to the seat here. There are two good trunks up ahead, two suit-cases here, a kit bag, and my rugs. But if — Oh, say . . . !"

Suddenly, with faltering voice and great, worn eyes that stared up out of a gray face, he had sunk back on the seat. For Miss Austin had torn the three letters in half, one by one, and deliberately dropped them out the window. This done, she stood looking down at him.

Again he drew the back of his hand across his forehead. The hand trembled; and beads of sweat glistened on the forehead. He tried to say something; but succeeded only in waving that shaky hand a little way toward the window and lifting his face with a despairing sort of question on it. He seemed absurdly like a little boy.

"We 've been talking nonsense, you and I," she said. "I don't intend to let you kill yourself. Not just yet, anyway. We 're going to try something else first."

He moved his head slowly from side to side. Then he said, huskily, "There 's nothing else."

"Yes, there is. You 're to play poker again tonight. You have at least a chance to win that money back."

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His lips parted in a bitter smile. "You know better than that. I 'm cleaned out, absolutely."

Miss Austin pursed her lips. She had thought, rather blindly, of lending him some part of her own slender funds; but now she suddenly realized that he would never accept it.

"Look here," he broke out, "you don't mean that you have said anything to Connor?"

"Wait," said she—"please! Your baggage is worth something, is n't it?"

A momentary expression of interest came into his face, and went out again. "Nothing in that," he muttered.

"Yes, there is." She nodded emphatically. "I don't want to deceive you. I *have* spoken to Mr. Connor."

"You 've spoken to him . . .!" he repeated slowly and breathlessly. He stared at her in a queer sort of bewilderment; then slowly got to his feet, pressing his hands to his temples as if they hurt him. He stood there, a tousled, haggard boy in his shirt sleeves, swaying with the movement of the car. Suddenly he turned on her.

"Won't you go?" he begged. She watched him, with that same odd, cold composure; but her eyes unexpectedly filled until she saw him through a mist. "Won't you go? Can't I just do this thing in peace? You mean to be kind. But, oh — for God's sake go!" And he dropped back on the seat.

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She shook her head. "No, I won't go," she said shortly, "not while you're staring mad. That girl has a right to be consulted. I can't let you decide it for both of you."

"I should n't have told you," he breathed. His head drooped forward; he was biting his nails. "I 'm ashamed. I 'm ashamed."

The car, that had been rolling easily along at fifteen miles an hour, became, at this moment, oddly unsteady. It lurched to one side, so violently that Miss Austin was pitched from her camp-stool to the floor. The boy sprang to help her up, as soon as he could recover his own balance. He had to lift her and lay her on the long seat. She opened her eyes just as he was about to dash a glassful of water in her face.

"Don't drown me," she murmured. "It took my breath, that 's all. What on earth is the matter?"

The car was bumping and lurching along.

"We 're off the rails," said he. "There 's not a thing to do. Just wait."

She managed to sit up, bracing herself against the window-casing. The wheels of the car struck some object, then seemed to bound over it. Miss Austin plunged forward, and would have struck the forward wall of the compartment had he not caught her by the arms.

"Some road-bed!" he muttered. "Just sit tight. Keep your nerve."

"My nerve is all right," she replied. "Funny how ·iet it seems."

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Suddenly he threw his arms around her and lifted her down an incline toward the closed door. The other wall and the window were going up in the air — very slowly, it seemed. Then, with a splintering sound, and a scream from somewhere, the car settled on its side.

Miss Austin found herself sitting on the door. Her new acquaintance was extricating himself from a heap of hand-baggage and the various loose equipment of the compartment.

"Well," said he, rubbing his elbow, "I guess that 'll be about all for the present."

She giggled nervously. "I never sat on a door before. And there 's the window in the ceiling."

"Yes," said he shortly, "that 's how we 're going to get out."

He stood up and considered their problem. "Do you think you could climb up that baggage-rack?"

She nodded.

"Then I 'll go up ahead and pull you through the window."

"Wait," said she; "first of all, I 'll pass your baggage up to you."

It was but a moment before they found themselves seated on what had been the side of the car, breathing in the cool night air and surveying a scene of wreckage. Their own car lay nearly at right angles to the track; of the two behind it, one had also overturned, the other had merely left the rails and burrowed a little way into the fine loose soil on which the track was laid.

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The forward section of the train, consisting of five or six cars, had broken loose and gone on down the track. They could see it now, dimly in the starlight, two hundred yards away. It had stopped, and dim black figures, very small, were dropping off and running back toward them. Some had lanterns, that bobbed up and down.

Then Miss Austin found herself lowered to the ground and left to watch a little heap of luggage, while William of Orange hurried off, first to bring her own bags and Wing, then to join the score of men who were passing women out through the windows or chopping openings through the roof. At one end of the second car appeared a flickering light; and she saw the Belgian conductor running toward it with a cylindrical fire extinguisher. She saw him snatch an axe from another and chop savagely, then point his extinguisher into the opening. But the light flickered more brightly, and points of red flame appeared.

The train was backing down toward them; she could hear the engine. And the rescuers were shouting a good deal. Women were led past her. Some of them were crying hysterically. Some laughed. A few were carried. The train was stopping now, a little way off. Lanterns were waving in circles. The exhaust suddenly blew off, thundering through the wide, calm night.

"How are you? All right?" asked a whispery voice at her elbow. She looked up at Mr. Tex Connor, and nodded brightly. There was quite a little

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light now from the burning car, and she could easily distinguish his features. At his elbow stood a man whom she had not seen before, a thin man with a heavily lined face and furtive eyes.

Just then William of Orange appeared. He was out of breath, and his face was covered with perspiration and streaked with soot. He carried his coat on his arm.

"There seems to be nobody very seriously hurt," he began; then recognized Connor, and stopped short.

Miss Austin looked at him from under puckered brows. Then she looked at big Tex Connor. Quite unconscious of the pleasing picture she made in the red, flickering light, unconscious of the groups of chattering and sobbing women behind her and of the curious, crowding Chinese who had suddenly appeared out of the very soil and were now wandering about looking covetously at the scattered heaps of luggage, she took an impulsive step forward. Her lips parted in a nervous, eager smile.

"Let 's — let 's have that game now!" she cried.

Tex Connor nodded.

William of Orange bit his lip, and drew back. Miss Austin stepped swiftly to his side and laid her hand on his arm. "You must n't fail me," she said, very softly.

Connor and the Manilla Kid were improvising a table with two suit-cases.

The boy shivered a little at the touch on his arm,

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and drew the back of a trembling hand across his sooty, sweaty forehead.

"I can't seem to think," he murmured. "I — I 'm being swept into this."

"All ready," observed Connor. "We can pass the time, at least. And the light 'll hold for a while."

Looking dazed, the boy stood by the suit-cases, gazing down at the big gambler who was already shuffling the cards. The Kid was dumping out a box of chips.

"This is silly," said William, unsteadily. "You can't play poker with only three."

"You can play with four, can't you?" interrupted the girl, seating herself on a kit bag at Connor's right.

"Oh, say —!" cried William.

"Sit down," commanded Connor.

The Manilla Kid swept his furtive eyes about the group, and then looked over at the blazing cars. "Some class to this!" he observed cheerfully; but was subdued by a flash from Connor's good eye.

William of Orange sat dejectedly on a catch-all bag that Connor had deftly placed there for him. Suddenly he threw back his head. "Look here," he cried, "there 's to be no handout about this. It 's got to be straight."

"Meaning," replied Connor coldly, laying down the pack and looking straight across at him, "that it was crooked this morning?"

"Oh, no — not that, of course," stammered the boy.

"Then pick up your cards," said Connor.

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"You can't play poker with only three." "You can play with four, can't you?"

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"I believe," observed William of Orange to the pale and tired but pretty girl who was sitting on the suit-case beside him, "that you are a thousand years old."

Miss Austin smiled wearily. It was close to midnight.

"I don't seem to know just what has happened," the boy went on. "But whatever it was, you did it. And it 's over now, all over. I 'm sure of that." He dropped his chin on his hands, and looked gloomily off toward the glowing line of ashes from which a lingering flame shot up now and then. "You don't look twenty — but you 're all of a thousand. You 've talked to me like a Dutch aunt. You 've walked right into my life and straightened it out. I 'm a charity case now." He jingled the gold coins in his pocket. "But perhaps that 's better than being a quitter. It makes me feel sick and ashamed; but I guess I 've got to face that."

"It looks like it," said she soberly.

"And I 've got to go back and face her, too. You were right. I 've got to. It will hurt."

"It will hurt her," said Miss Austin.

"That 's what I mean," he explained, unsteadily. And after a moment he went on. "You know, the wonderful thing about it all is the way you understand. Usually folks like you, steady, nervy, well-balanced folks, have no patience with my kind. You know. People with no nerves, that could n't do foolish things

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themselves. . . . Say, I think your mother is looking for you."

"My mother!" repeated Miss Austin.

"Yes, over there."

Miss Austin discerned the rather plump outlines of the white-haired woman from Buffalo. Then she said, feeling suddenly forlorn: "That 's not my mother."

"Why, I thought — she was with you this morning —"

"I never saw her before this morning," murmured Miss Austin.

"But —"

"I 'm traveling alone."

"Alone! — You?"

She nodded, compressing her lips.

He stiffened up, and looked intently at her. She found herself shrinking from his gaze. "You knew Tex Connor," he said, half to himself.

"No, I did not! I told you that. I never saw *him* before, either."

"Well, what on earth —!"

"I think," she said, after a moment, "that I 'll tell you. I 'm certain to break down and tell somebody pretty soon, and it may as well be you. I was with my aunt and uncle at Tientsin. They 've gone around the other way to Shanghai, by water." She hesitated. Then —"I ran away from them," she added, while a faint flush spread over her fair cheeks and something between reminiscent interest and sheer defiance lighted

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her big hazel eyes. She was glad the fire had died down.

"You ran away! Oh, you should n't have done that."

Miss Austin was smiling a very little now. "It was funny," she said. "You know, the Shanghai boat leaves Tientsin after midnight. I went aboard with the party, at ten o'clock or so. But I did n't take off my clothes. And after they were all asleep I slipped ashore with my bags and Wing. My trunks went on with them."

"But — but — did nobody stop you?"

"Nobody in sight but a Chinese steward. Then I *had* a problem. I could n't very well go back to the Astor House. So I sat on a bench in Victoria Park until morning."

"On a bench!"

"Yes. Then after it got light I went over to the railway-station and got a little breakfast and waited for the Peking train. That was yesterday."

"But then, if that was yesterday"— William of Orange was struggling to control the alarming pictures that rose before his mind's eye —"you must have spent last night in Peking!"

Miss Austin nodded. "Yes, that was a bore. You see, a lot of people know me at the hotel. I could n't go there."

"But my dear child — where on earth!"

"Dixie Carmichael took me in."

"You don't mean —"

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"Yes, the girl-gambler. She helped me once before."

"This is dreadful. But apart from all that, did n't it occur to you that your uncle and aunt would be frantic?"

"Oh, I left a note telling them exactly what I was doing." She giggled softly. "It was to be delivered after they were safely across the Taku Bar, not before. Their ship stops at Chefoo and Tsingtau; it will take them five days. They 'll reach Shanghai just about when I do."

William of Orange sat in stupified silence.

"You 're wondering why I did it," said she.

"Yes. Rather."

"I 'd just as soon you knew, after all you 've told me. It 's a relief to tell somebody. Aunt and Uncle played a trick on me, and I would n't stand it. Perhaps I *am* a little hard to manage, from their point of view. Anyhow, they were worried about being responsible for me any longer, and so they deliberately tried to wish me on somebody else. Listen, what do you think of marriage without love?"

"Why — why — How do you mean?"

"From the girl's point of view. The idea seems to be that as soon as our fathers have invested all they can afford in us, we are to be handed over to the nearest man that looks as if *he* could afford us. My aunt simply can't understand why I don't fall for somebody right off quick."

"Fall for —"

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"Suppose we don't want to marry," the girl rushed on earnestly. "Take me, for example. I don't — not now. Marriage on the old-fashioned basis"— She compressed her lips and shook her head emphatically. "Am I to be thrown at some man I don't love just because I 'm a problem to my elders? It relieves them, yes. But how about me? And what does it settle? . . . No, I don't see the thing at all."

"But"— William was groping back toward the "stable truths" of life — "you might learn to love him."

"Who — Bob? Not likely. And I can't imagine anything more immoral, the way I feel now, than shutting myself in a house with him. After somebody has made it 'all right' by reading at us out of a book. Don't you see?"

"Not quite," said he. "I don't believe I ever heard anybody talk like this. You frighten me — a little. If you destroy the sacredness of marriage —"

"I 'm not destroying anything."

He turned and looked at her. She was, after all, a slender little thing. She was tired, unstrung in fact; a girl, and therefore to be sheltered and protected. She did n't know what she was talking about. And she was on his hands, here at the heart of the Great Plain of China, in the middle of the night, surrounded by gamblers, globe-trotters, and the queerly mixed folk of the Coast. It wrung his heart.

But she was still speaking. "Bob has wanted to marry me for a long time. I have n't seen him since

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we left Shanghai, last fall. But he has been writing. Now they 've ordered him home from the China station — he 's a navy man — and he wrote asking if he might meet us at Yokohama and cross the Pacific with us. The letter was framed so that I could hardly say yes without accepting him at the same time. What could I do? Tell him I 'd marry him, or forbid him to travel by the Pacific Mail. I just could n't answer the letter.

" But I happened to let Aunt read it. Evidently she talked it over with Uncle; and they worked up a letter to him. It was n't straight. You can imagine how I felt when he turned up — not at Yokohama, but away up there at Tientsin, to take the whole journey with us, a nice little party of four. Expecting all sorts of things. And Uncle Frank was chuckling over it. I spent just one day getting mad, and then I left them "— again that soft little giggle —" left them with my trunks. If they did n't stick on the Taku Bar they 're somewhere near Cheefoo now. Buying laces, maybe." A note of whimsical impudence crept into her voice. " You can get lovely laces at Cheefoo."

There was a silence. Then —" Why, what is it? " she asked, her voice faltering a little; for William of Orange had sprung to his feet with sudden energy. He stood over her now, looking down with determination written on every line of his figure. By a flicker of light from the last of the burning cars she could see that his face, still with those streaks of soot on

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it, was firm — stern, even. Her little wave of excitement passed, she knew again that she was very, very tired.

"What are you going to do?" she asked weakly.

"For one thing," he said shortly, "I'm going to take care of you. Stay right here until I come back." And he stalked away.

It was a command.

A big shadow fell before her. She looked up. Tex Connor stood at her side.

"I was sorry," he said, in that amusing, whispery voice, "to see you lose that fifteen. I could n't play all the hands for everybody, you know."

"Oh, I did n't mind. It was worth it."

"Well," said he, noncommittally, turning his head and glancing over to where William of Orange, erect and dignified, was talking with the Buffalo woman and her husband —"maybe it was. Maybe not. The train 's going on pretty soon, the conductor says. It 'll be crowded. Say, I thought maybe you 'd let me give you this. Not," he added hastily, "by way of paying you back. But just as a sort of personal memento." And he handed her a small package.

"Oh," she cried, brightening up, "you should n't, Mr. Connor!" Then she opened it, and found within a box of Japanese Damascene work, contrived of glistening gold bronze with slender waving rushes of beaten silver on the sides. She held it to the light with dancing eyes; then her face clouded; and she looked up in quick protest.

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"Would you mind — er — just keeping it?" said he.

She hesitated; looked thoughtfully at him; then smiled. "Yes, Mr. Connor," she said simply, "I will keep it. And thank you."

"Thank you," he replied. . . . "And say, if you don't mind my mentioning it, you can't knock around alone out here on the Coast. There are people that would n't understand. And I just took the liberty of asking that lady with the white hair to take care of you, as far as she goes. Somebody 's got to, you know."

"Somebody?" mused Miss Austin, ruefully. She heard voices, turned and saw that William of Orange was leading the Buffalo couple toward them. So he had hit on precisely the same solution. "Somebody? Everybody 's doing it!"

The gambler did not quite hear what she had said. He bent forward respectfully; then, as she kept silence, straightened up again.

"It 's coolish, for May," whispered Mr. Connor, unexpectedly, glancing toward the dying fire and rubbing his hands together.

Later still, Miss Austin lay in the upper berth of a stuffy compartment. In the lower berth the white-haired woman was snoring faintly. And the fraction of a train, with men sleeping foot to head in the corridors, was creeping southward toward the great city of the Yangtze and the Han.

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Miss Austin had never before felt so sure of herself, or so scornful of the timidities and precautions of her elders.

"Funny thing," she mused. "I was taking pretty good care of myself, it seems to me. Wonder why it's never the good men that are so terribly conservative about women, but the bad ones?"

After which sweeping and curiously accurate half truth, she drifted slowly into dreamland.

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VIII

CHINESE FOR TROUBLE

THE Chinese storekeeper counted out the great heap of gold sovereigns. It took quite a time. Then he swept them into a grimy canvas bag that had Chinese lettering on it in red, and tied the strings with reverential care. After which, with equal care, he opened the glass door behind him, and put away on a shelf the priceless old pottery camel that Miss Edith Austin had just sold him. The transaction was important, even for that street of important transactions, Nanking Road, Shanghai.

The girl was surprised at the weight of the bag of gold. "Why," she cried, as she swung it off the counter, "it weighs pounds and pounds!" And she laughed, with a pretty rush of color into her cheeks and a sparkle of sheer excitement in her hazel eyes. "I believe that dear old camel is the luckiest thing that ever happened to me!"

"Or the unluckiest," Mr. Henry Carpenter had on the tip of his tongue. But, being a shrewd, reflective man, an experienced observer of human beings on the Coast, where they run rather wilder than common, he seldom let what was on the tip of his tongue get

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past his lips. And so he was silent now; he merely looked at the slim girl who had the attribute of pleasing and alarming him at the same time.

At the moment she was even more pleasing than usual — and more alarming. She wore a simple white frock, with a loose white serge coat drawn over it, high white shoes (in the British East, whatever the heat, pumps are unpardonable!) and a small hat with a green motoring-veil caught up about it. Against the showcase leaned a long-handled green parasol.

"And now," she observed, suddenly becoming briskly businesslike, "you and I must settle up. It was dear of you to help me. Let's see — I owe you for the steamer-trunk, and all those things I had to buy, and my ticket to Naples —"

Another canvas bag was called for, and all of a pound and a half of the precious metal was transferred to the inside coat-pocket of Mr. Carpenter, where it bulged perceptibly.

He was looking at her again, in that reflective way he had, with eyelids drooping a little. "I'm sorry you're going," he said.

She glanced up swiftly at him, then away. It was nice of him to be sorry. He was a dear old thing. His business was buying cutch —"and such." So much he had told her. It occurred to her now that she had meant to ask what cutch is.

"I'm sorry on your account as well as my own," he added. This stirred some feelings of discomfort

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within her. He was an inescapable man. He had a way of pinning you down. "I 've helped you because — well, you 're not a child" (this was decent of him, at least), "and if you 're determined to go I don't feel that I have the right to stop you. But it worries me."

"Oh, don't let it distress you," she said, suppressing the toss of the head that was meant to go with the remark — for he *was* an old dear. "I 'm quite an experienced traveler," she added, less pertly.

"Yes, I know," said he. "I 'm taking that into account. But you 've been in the papers a good deal; and now you 're doing a very conspicuous thing — the particular kind of thing that is least understood out here. It will come up in a good many ways to disturb you. And there may be positive dangers."

She swung the bag of gold up to the show-case and rested it there, looking at it, while a faint flush shone through her fair skin. So this man was going to talk like the others! And he *had* seemed to understand. It almost made her want to cry out the protest that was stirring in her soul. She wanted to say (for he, unlike the others, was at least intelligent and considerate): "Well, what if there *are* dangers? Why should n't I face them? I hate — *hate* — this taking for granted that a girl has no character at all; that she will go all to pieces at the first opportunity! Is n't that what all this sheltering and protecting means? If I 'm *that* kind, had n't I better find it out right now, once and for all?"

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But, of course, she said nothing of the kind — merely turned up toward his kindly gaze a face that was beginning to pale a little, and that showed only the faintest signs of her extreme inner turbulence.

But those faint signs were enough. Mr. Carpenter's eyes narrowed again. He spread his feet a little apart and thrust his hands into his trousers pockets. So he stood for a moment, in deep thought.

And then, suddenly, he came to a decision. Miss Austin felt it, and wondered, with a flutter of interest, what it could be. That it in some way concerned herself was certain.

"I am sorry to worry you," she said gently (she had wanted, at first, to say, "I 'm sorry you don't trust me"); "but it 's the way I feel. And I can't take any other course. It has been very hard to decide. Anything I do is certain to distress either me or somebody else. There are reasons why I simply can't take that long journey home with Aunt and Uncle. I can't! I 've got to be alone."

He did not press it further. For a little time he went right on thinking, quite as if she were n't there at all. Finally he said: "Now I 've got to leave you — and it is another thing that worries me. Will you let me do this — telephone the Consulate and have them send a man to go about with you until you 're safe on the wharf, at least? You see,"— he caught the shadow that flitted across her face,—" you 've got four or five pounds of gold there, and it would n't be any too safe for a man to knock around Shanghai

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with that amount of money — in a bag — in plain sight. It is too late in the day to change it into any sort of paper. Besides, it 's heavy."

She inclined her head. "All right," she replied, with the expression of one who is making a large concession; "I will let you do that. And — and I 'm sorry you have to go." She said this very frankly and sweetly.

"So am I," he replied soberly, "very sorry."

She hesitated. "Do we say good-bye, then?"

"Oh, no." He shook his head. "I shall be on the Bund for the first trip of the tender. If I miss you, by any chance, I shall go straight out to the ship." He was smiling in a way that puzzled her a little. "I 'll call up the Consulate now. And you must wait here until somebody comes to look after you."

A moment later he was hurrying out of the shop. She followed him as far as the door, carefully taking her parasol, but casually leaving the bag of gold on the show-case. She had once had a parasol stolen.

She saw him nod to a man who had ridden a bicycle to the curb, and pause for a word.

She did not see him, a little way down the street, leap into the first pony victoria that cruised by, and dash for the German Club, that big white building on the Bund. (It is a reasonably safe guess that when a German steamship agent has finished his day's work he will be found in the immediate vicinity of food.)

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She did not see him when, a little later, with passage to Hongkong in his pocket (courtesy of the now cabinless second purser), he whirled around to the cable office and sent off sixty-three dollars' worth of messages. Nor did she see him, at his room in the Astor House, packing a trunk, two suit-cases, and a catch-all bag with the deft assistance of a Chinese body-servant. Mr. Carpenter, it would appear, could move, on occasion, with decision and despatch.

She did, however, observe the man on the bicycle to whom Mr. Carpenter had spoken. A youngish man he was, and an American. He was looking up at her, steadying himself against the curb by stretching out a none too well shod foot. And her brows puckered slowly into a frown — a frown that deepened, if anything, when he, with some diffidence, raised his hat. Which head-piece was a battered old derby, rather oddly out of season.

He was a bony man; his Chinese-tailored sack suit hung wrinkled and loose on his frame. His face was not unattractive — not quite. The chin was small, and was gentle, almost soft, in outline; a weak feature, on the whole. The mouth above it suggested extreme sensitiveness; the lips were compressed, as if from a long-standing habit of patient self-suppression, and lines curved down around the corners from the sides of his nose. But, beneath the brim of the derby hat, which had settled on the back of his head after his tentative greeting, was exposed a sweat-beaded forehead that was higher and wider than com-

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mon. And the eyes beneath it were large, blue, and almost disturbingly ingenuous.

An unbusinesslike person, surely, whose judgment would be none of the shrewdest; not quite what you would call an enterprising man; the sort on whom the Fates, in idle and ruthless moments, are inclined to play tricks; the sort that does well, indeed, to learn submission. He wore a necktie that was perceptibly frayed at the top where the knot is tied. His shapeless trouser-legs were confined in steel clips.

While she looked, a creaking passenger wheelbarrow, its proprietor frantically dodging a motor-car, ran into his rear wheel and spilled him over the curb. He arose with dust spots on his knees and a dent in the old derby, rescued the bicycle, and, dodging through the slow-moving current of tourists, white residents, Chinese and Eurasians of various sorts on the sidewalk, leaned the wheel against the store-front. Then, as the girl was still there in the doorway, he stepped up beside her.

"I'm sorry to disturb you again, Miss Austin," he began. "But I wonder if — for just a few minutes —"

He faltered. For this rather bewilderingly cool and beautiful girl was looking straight at him out of big hazel eyes that had a snap in them, and that appeared to be turning brown, or near it, with something very like anger.

"But I thought," said she, tapping a white toe impatiently, "that you were *not* to disturb me again."

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His eyes wandered away. She was still looking at him, more intently than, in her preoccupation, she knew. Thus she chanced to observe the flush that spread upward from his collar, and the oddly child-like contour of his chin, and the compressed, patient mouth that suddenly quivered with emotion.

"You surely don't suppose I 'm here from choice," he broke out unexpectedly,—"as if I enjoyed annoying you!"

It was an out-and-out personal remark, wholly uncalled for, but quite what might be expected from that babylike chin and those big, rather unreal blue eyes.

Miss Austin's restive foot ceased its tapping, and her frown relaxed a little. Her eyes ranged from the circles of dust on his knees to the absurd dent in his hat. She ought to send him away; she ought to flee into the store, even — or so it would seem.

"Then why *do* you annoy me?" she asked, not so hostile.

"Because the managing-editor has instructed me to get the Edith Austin story," he muttered, gazing at the fat Chinese policeman out there in the center of the early evening traffic, "and not to come back without it."

"But that is absurd," said she. "There is no Edith Austin story."

"Oh, yes, there is," said he. "You *did* run away from your uncle and aunt at Tientsin —"

"How do you know that?" she asked, with wide eyes.

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"You surely don't suppose I'm here from choice," he broke out unexpectedly.

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"Our Peking man happens to be on the boat with them now. Mr. Wilberly has admitted it — we have that by wireless. When a little coaster sticks for three days on the Taku Bar, folks get acquainted pretty fast, you know. And, more than that —"

"Well, what more than that?" It was her turn to flush.

Clearly the reporter was going to do his duty, if it blasted him. "Lieutenant Robert Carver of the navy is with them. We have an old picture of him; and the assistant city editor himself got a snap shot of you yesterday — on the street. And we have a big head in type right now."

"But what about?" asked the girl; then bit her lip. "This is silly."

"Oh, romance — that sort of thing. Our people hesitate to run the story until we can find the key — the real facts of your disappearance, and how Mr. Carver comes in. My instructions are to find out whether you and he have quarreled, or"— he hesitated an instant, then went on doggedly, with a little gulp —"or whether there 's another man."

"Oh, but surely your paper would n't —" Her voice faltered. The sudden thought that her character was in the hands of this queer reporter person with the stove-in derby hat and the bicycle clips came over her with unsettling force.

"I know of very few things the paper would n't do," he replied listlessly. "Things have changed a lot out here; since that San Francisco bunch broke in.

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We 're yellow now, all except the stodgy old English papers. But, even at that, Miss Austin, I 'm afraid you *are* a story. 'Beautiful young heiresses' don't so often run away from their folks — all prominent people, you know — and go dashing mysteriously about on their own. Not out here on the Coast."

She said nothing. How crude he was! And yet, "He 's the honestest thing I ever saw," she thought, in her bewilderment. He was even helping her, in a painful sort of way. That is, if it helps you to know how you look to other people. But painful it was; and very confusing. She felt weak, for the moment, and stood gripping the long handle of her parasol with both hands, even leaning on it a little.

It was now six thirty-five by her bracelet watch. Before midnight the big German Mail ship, lying out there in the muddy Whangpo a few miles below the Bund, would be swinging off on the thirty-day journey to Europe, *via* Suez. At this very moment a belated Hamburg-American coaster was waddling down the Yellow Sea toward Shanghai, sputtering wireless instructions from an irate uncle to Miss Edith Austin — ordering her, in fact, as if she were a disobedient child, to place herself at once for safe keeping in the hands of the Consul-General's lady. Two of these messages — little balls of blue and white paper — lay crumpled within the shopping-bag that swung from her wrist.

And now, just when time pressed most desperately, when her soul was in such a blaze of rebellion

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that she could n't figure out what on earth would be right to do and what wrong, to have this dreadful newspaper story break over her head like a typhoon — a story she could never, never run away from — not even on German Mail ships *via* Suez!

She would n't mind so much if they had n't dragged Bob Carver in, and all that horrid suggestion that was already growing,— spreading like fire,— lashed by the merciless, foully fed tongue of the Coast.

Perhaps she ought to stay and face it. Perhaps even a seven-thousand-mile scolding from her aunt and uncle — perhaps even seven thousand miles of day-by-day intimacy with Bob, wearing down little by little her independence and her standards, diverting little by little her personal sense of direction in life, until she married, as so many girls marry, in sheer weariness and spiritual defeat, hoping that they may "learn to love"— perhaps even these things would be better than to give high color to the whole miserable story by running away now. There was still time to get her dog and her baggage off the steamer. Launches would be running until ten o'clock or so.

She did not know that she had turned very white, or that her fingers were still gripping very tightly the handle of the green parasol. Indeed, so intense was her preoccupation with this great central problem of her young life that it was a moment before she quite realized that he was speaking again.

"I was over at the Consulate just now." For this was what he was saying. "And they 're all stirred

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up about you. Your uncle has instructed them to hold you here until he arrives. They showed me the message. It seems that you are — well, not quite of legal age yet. They 've picked up the rumor that you are planning to leave to-night by the German Mail, and the Vice-Consul has just sent a man down to the Bund to detain you if you try to get aboard the launch."

He hesitated a little over it, and looked directly down at her, with a simple kindness that was attractive in a homely sort of way — rather appealing, even. Now that she was no longer the extremely cool, self-sufficient Miss Austin of former encounters, but a white and obviously bewildered little girl, he was losing his diffidence.

She did n't appear to realize that she was still gazing intently at him, not until their eyes met squarely. Which was a bit disconcerting — in a new way. A little color came slowly into her cheeks. She bit her lip again. Then a suggestion of fright came to her face, and she looked hurriedly down the street in the direction of the Bund. And then, in the rapid sequence of emotions that was racing through her nervous system, the fright gave place to anger — good, healthy anger. So the Consul-General's man was going to " detain " her if she tried to board the launch!

Again she looked up at him, and caught her breath.

" Listen," she said. " I *am* going to take the German Mail."

" To-night ? "

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"To-night."

"But"— he was fairly staring at her, suddenly as free from self-consciousness as she herself —"they 'll never let you get away."

"I 'll hire a sampan, then. And I 'll go late."

"But — but — but — but —"

He was stuttering; and they both laughed a little.

"Listen," said she. "There 's a man on his way here now from the Consulate. I 've simply got to leave this shop before he comes. And all my money is in there in a bag."

"In where?"

"Here in the shop. I must have left it on the show-case."

"You must have — is it gold?"

"Yes. Four or five pounds. I 'm a little worried about carrying it. You see, you can't hide it, and —"

"Why can't you? That 's only twenty-odd dollars."

"Oh, no," she cried; "not English pounds!"

"You don't mean avoirdupois?"

"Yes, or is it Troy? You see —"

But he interrupted her by catching her arm and hurrying her back into the shop.

"Great heavens!" he was whispering in her ear, as they passed between two seven-foot Ming vases on carved blackwood pedestals. "Four or five pounds — that 's all of — and there 's been any number of people going in and out."

"There it is!" said she then.

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There it was, still on the show-case, and guarded by the proprietor, who looked as nearly worried as a Chinaman can look.

The reporter picked it up, and stowed it under his coat. "Come," he said, and took her arm again.

As they left the shop, he looked back along the street and caught sight of a rickshaw, half a block away, in which sat a languid young man with a white topee on his head and a bamboo stick between his knees. "Quick!" breathed the reporter. And he rushed her along close to the buildings, at a speed that caused a stiff-necked Englishman, two drunken sailors, and a Hindoo merchant to turn and look after them — after the bony reporter with the stove-in derby and bicycle clips, and the slim, pretty girl with excited eyes.

"They 've sent young Patterson," he said, as they rounded the corner into an alley-like little street. "We 'll let him wait a while." He chuckled nervously. "There 's a lot of rather good blue-and-white in there for him to look at, if the time hangs heavy; and some *cloisonné*." And he dragged her, between a walk and a run, a little way up Kiukiang Road, through another alley, around three quiet corners, past the Parsee cemetery; and finally let her pause for breath on the more populous Canton Road, while he hailed a victoria.

"We 'd better not risk separating in rickshaws," he explained.

"But —" She was out of breath, and her voice

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faltered. "But are you — You've been very good — I must n't trouble you."

He looked at her; then turned away, with a gulp, and made a show of watching the carriage as it wheeled around to the curb. His sensitive lips were compressed very tightly, and there was a pained, almost a hunted expression about his eyes. Suddenly he looked at her again, very determined now, and a little wild, like a man who has just made the boldest decision of his life, and who is headed, full steam, for deep waters.

She shrank back. He frightened her.

"I 'm going to see you through," he said, with that low, nervous laugh. "You leave Shanghai to-night on the German Mail! There 's my hand on it! We 'll let the uncle rage and the Consul-General imagine a vain thing. Get in. The first thing is for you to have food. We 'll drive around behind the race-course and out Bubbling Well Road. We have a little time to kill. And nobody will look for you out there."

She had let her hand drift into his. After all, why not? It was only for a few hours. He could n't be thinking of himself, in the usual masculine way, for he was pledged to the task of sending her off. And he was n't a man you could be afraid of for long — not with that sad, gentle mouth, that made you want to take care of him, and the dust spots on his knees that he had n't even thought to brush off.

She stepped into the low carriage and sank back on

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the seat, he swinging in after her, and shouting something to the mafoo in Chinese.

She laughed softly.

"What is it?" said he. The mafoo was cracking his whip over the shaggy Manchurian pony.

"I did n't know you could talk Chinese. It sounds so funny."

At this he became very grave, and a little white about the mouth. He made no reply. She wondered.

They rolled swiftly around just outside the wide turn of the race-course and into Bubbling Well Road, the lively, rather dubious street of the enchanting name. It was alive with motors, rickshaws, and carriages. Prosperous Chinese hong merchants rode in a sort of state; flashy gentlemen, patrons perhaps of the gambling houses out this way; painted girls, white girls, superbly gowned, at sight of whom Edith felt something tighten within her, and her thoughts raced with a curious wonder; a dozen British sailors hilariously pulling rickshaws, while their coolies sat with frightened grins on the seats behind them; rougher characters, riding and afoot; discharged American soldiers from the Philippines; schemers, swindlers, and outlaws from everywhere in the world; stranded victims of the wanderlust, who were here because they could n't get away; even, here and there, the ragged "beachcomber" of traditional fiction.

"My goodness!" said Miss Austin, sitting erect.

"What?" cried he, nervously looking about.

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"Your wheel — you left it there in front of the shop."

He started at this, even looked disturbed; and let one foot slide down to the step of the low-hung vehicle.

"We can go back there," said she — "or nearly there. You could slip around and get it."

He hesitated a moment longer. She could not make out the conflicting emotions on his extraordinarily open face; but he hardly looked like a man who could afford to lose a bicycle.

Then he perplexed her still more by throwing back his head and laughing. He laughed too loud, so that people in passing vehicles looked across at them.

And they drove on.

"I wonder if this is all perfectly dreadful?" mused Edith aloud.

He looked up from his American steak (he had ordered lavishly) and regarded their queerly assorted fellow diners. It was in a restaurant well out on Bubbling Well Road. At the next table sat four men who could not possibly have been anything in the world but gamblers, one of whom, a thin man with a deeply lined face and a livid purple puff under one eye, had a familiar look. Just beyond them were two Europeans, over-red as to face, with two of those very elaborately dressed "American girls" from Soochow Road. On the other side was a rougher group, inclined to drink rather persistently of Japan-

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ese-made champagne in genuine French bottles, and further inclined, with equal persistency, to eye Miss Austin and her escort. In a corner, a group of sailors — "Always they sailors," paraphrased Edith — were singing under their breath the extremely British comic song recently popularized on the Coast by the Purple Mysteries — "They Pushed Him through the Window."

"It *is* rough," said he, in reply to her remark of a moment back. "But then, all Shanghai eating-places are that. The only difference is that some are dressier."

"I did n't mean the restaurant," said she. "Still, it is right. I 've got to go. I could n't stay here."

At this he grew moody. "Shanghai is n't a very good place to stay."

"Only for short trips," she observed; then added impulsively: "Think, *think* of the poor people that get stranded here and *have* to stay."

An instant later she could have bitten her tongue off; for his eyes had drooped and that odd whiteness had come about his mouth.

"Oh," she murmured in confusion, "I did n't think; but you have n't had —"

"I 've been here nine years," said he, very quiet.

"But you 've been back — you 've had trips —"

He slowly shook his head. "It 's eleven years next month since I 've seen the home town; or any of my folks."

She did not know what to say. Tears came to her

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eyes. He was so sort of crushed — and so patient and sweet about it. How he must feel, sometimes, watching other Americans come and go; gay and irresponsible; throwing money around, while he struggled to keep barely alive! His clothes did look like that. And he had n't even a proper hat for the hot weather — nothing but that absurd old derby.

"Under the spreading chestnut tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith a mighty man is he —
But they pushed him through the window!"

The British sailors were drunker now, and louder. Merrily they bellowed the refrain:

"The win — dow!
The win — dow!
They pushed him through the window!
With the muscles of his brawny arms
They pushed him through the window."

The reporter sat looking moodily at the table-cloth. After a little time he drew from his inside coat pocket a bundle of "copy" paper that was scribbled in pen and pencil on both sides.

"I 've had dreams," he said, in a voice that was growing husky. "But I guess we all have those. For five years, off and on, I 've tinkered at this thing here. Once — that was two years ago — your friend Carpenter showed it to a big New York manager who was out here. But he said nobody 'd be interested in Chinese opera; said they 'd think of laundrymen."

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"Oh, it's an opera?" said she, looking with interest at the closely scribbled sheets.

"A libretto — sort of between comic and romantic. It's called 'Mary and the Mandarin.' I've tried to catch some — even a little — of the color and charm there is out here. Oh, if you could only make 'em *feel* it!"

"I know," murmured Edith, thinking of camel trains in sunken roads and gray old walled villages and winding brown valleys where pear trees blossomed. "I know. If you could only make them feel it!

"You see," he went on, with a frankness that was too simple and honest to be wholly depressing, "it's the only chance a chap like me has of ever getting back — making a sudden killing of some sort. And sometimes, when I realize that I may never even have that one glimpse of the old town, I sort o' lose my nerve. I tried the lottery for a while. And little pecks at the pari-mutuel. And then this opera. Working nights, you know. For three years it looked like a sure thing to me; the lovely Chinese color would have been new stuff on Broadway. But that manager sort o' discouraged me, I guess. And then, if you stay here too long, you get like the Chinese — your mind turns gray, and you lose your energy. It's only lately that I've taken it up again."

He had leaned forward on the table. Now the bag of gold, which he had placed in his lap, slid off, and struck the floor with a solid thud and a chink.

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The bag of gold slid off, and struck the floor with a solid thud and a chink.

Both started. Their eyes met. Nothing but a bag of gold coins could possibly have made just that sound.

They looked down. There it lay, on the floor beside the table — the old canvas bag, tied with strings and with Chinese characters on the side in red.

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The sound had been heard by others. The gambler persons were staring down at it; one of them whistling softly. A painted girl with gay, roving eyes lifted her glass to them and laughed. The Chinese waiter retrieved the bag, frankly surprised at the weight; held it up rather conspicuously; restored it to the reporter's lap.

They were silent for a few moments, conscious that many eyes were taking them in. Then he grew moody again. And memories came to him.

"Japan is lovely at this time," he observed. "And earlier in the spring. Nine years ago this month I was in Yokohama. Was headed for home, but could n't get any farther. Say, did you ever take a rickshaw ride over the Bluff to Mississippi Bay?"

She never had.

"There was a tea-house there. The usual cherry blossoms. And a little girl. I used to sit there by the hour, watching the torpedo-boats practise, and trying to teach her English. Wrote my 'Mississippi Bay' song out of that." He was looking eagerly among the loose sheets. "But say, I must n't bore you with this."

"Go on," she said softly. "Tell me more."

"Here we are! The onjenoo sings it — Mary's little sister. There 's the usual verse. Starts like this —

"On Mississippi Bay,
Over Yokohama way,
In a sampan,
In Japan,

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Sat a little maid afloat
Where the shadows hid the boat —
O Sakada,
Sakada San!

"There's some more of it — reg'lar sentimental story, you know — and then this chorus. I always sort o' liked it." He cleared his throat, which was husky again, and blushed a little; then recited in a low singsong, beating out the rhythm softly with his finger-tips on the table-cloth:

"Come back, Yankee Sailorman, to Mississippi Bay!
A little heart is beating,
A wistful mouth is greeting;
The cherry blossoms droop so,
The petals slowly fall;
The white-faced tourists troop so
Beyond the tea-house wall.
Come back, Yankee Sailorman, and anchor with the tide —
Trail your flag of red and white,
Spread your stars above my night,
Come you back to Mississippi Bay!"

Edith straightened up and drew in a quick breath. "Why," she said gently, with a sparkle in her eyes, "it's good!"

He blushed again, like a child. "You like it? It's all rough, of course, more like notes, but — Now, here! The first act is the courtyard of the Wagon-lits hotel at Peking — as it used to be, before

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they built the new part across the front. Chorus of girl tourists trying on Mandarin coats. Native merchants, hotel boys, rickshaw runners — so forth. With the color and glitter of the coats, it would be beautiful, you know. The girls sing:

"Mandarin girl in blue,
Mandarin girl in red —
Mandarin girl,
With dimple and curl,
Tossing her dainty head!
Mandarin girl in silk and in satin,
Pattern of golden swirl,
Fascinate Muscovite, Teuton, and Latin —
Fancy-free, wanderin',
Teasin', philanderin',
Dear little Mandarin girl!

"You have to force the rhymes a little; but then, as I said, it 's just rough stuff. Now, then — oh yes, this! It has a swing, sort of. You know,"— he beat the air with a long forefinger,—"tumpy-tee-tum, tee-doodle-dee-oodle; tumpy-tee-tum-tee-doo! It 's part of a solo:

"A girl is a girl in kerchief and sabot,
A girl is a girl in plaid;
In trappings from Turkey and things Singalese;
In trumpery, frumpery trinkets from Greece;
Thinner or fatter,
It does n't much matter,
Or whether she 's tiny or tall —

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and on like that. Oh, I left out a couplet. Well, never mind! You see, Mary's mama 's trying to find — well, here 's the song —

"Mary's mama searched the Peerage,
Mary's mama read up Burke —

"Oh no, wait! The second verse explains it:

"Mary's mama very rich is;
Mary's mama searched with might;
Met rebuffs, delays, and hitches —
Title market very tight.
Other Marys' mamas had
Captured every titled lad.

"Then the girls' chorus:

"Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
What do you think of that?
No title found
Anywhere round,
From Berlin to Ballarat!
Mary, Mary, were you wary —

"This same rhythm comes in at the end of the song, where it runs:

"If catch proper prince no can,
Why not catchee Chinaman?

"Mary, Mary, quite contrary,
What will you ever do,
Dining in state
Off willowware plate,
Munching your split bamboo!

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Mary, Mary, light and airy,
Flirting your silken fan;
You must kotow —

and so on — like that."

Edith reached out and rested a hand on his as it rummaged through the scribbled sheets with the feverish energy of the creative soul. He started at the touch, looked up, and, slowly collecting himself, saw that her lips were parted in an excited smile and that her eyes were shining.

"If you don't stop giving me just snatches, this way," she was saying, "I don't know what I'll do to you. Why, it's lovely. I had no *idea* — you're a perfect old fraud! Now, Man, I want you to begin at the beginning and read me every word. Every word, mind!"

"Oh," said he, his face alight with the utter happiness of the poet who finds himself appreciated, "I was afraid, you see —"

"Do as I tell you!" commanded Edith. "Read it all!"

Accordingly, he read it all. All, that is, except the big duet, "Maskee means never mind." He had apparently lost it out of the lot of sheets. Maybe it was home somewhere, kicking around. "It's where the lovers have to part," he explained.

"It's after nine," said Edith, looking at the watch on her wrist. "And I could just cry. But, if I'm going —"

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He was too deep in the work of his heart of hearts to come to earth in a moment. At the reminder that this wonderful evening must end, he sat and blinked at her. Slowly the radiance died out of his face, until it had ranged the whole distance from glory to gloom. He looked at her with an intensity that fastened her eyes to his and made her hold her breath. He lowered his gaze to the scattered papers; then took to marking a Chinese character on them with his pencil — all over them. In the quarter-hour that followed, with only an occasional disconnected phrase spoken by either, he must have made that character fifty times, the same queer character each time. "It looks like a conventionalized spider," thought Edith.

She began to realize that she was tired; and this protracted reaction of his was a strain.

"So you write Chinese, too?" she ventured.

"Yes," said he, without looking up. And again he went white about the mouth.

A few more minutes passed. Then, suddenly and shortly, he pushed back his chair, stuffed the wad of scribbled sheets back into his pocket, and rose, the bag of gold in his hand.

"Come on," he said huskily. "We 'll go."

Almost timidly she followed him — literally followed him — out. He called a carriage. They dashed off along the electric-lighted road.

Another carriage followed them. He turned and looked back at it. And at the same time he gathered

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her little hand rather roughly into his own and held it firmly.

"I 've been a dam' fool," he said, as if he were thinking aloud. "Lost my head completely. I think we 're going to have trouble. I 've exposed you to every kind of a row, God knows!"

He released her hand long enough to tuck the bag of gold between them on the seat, then deliberately recaptured it. And she let him.

"How 's your nerve?" he asked.

"Oh,"— her voice faltered,—"I 'll do my part."

"Tired — are n't you?"

"Well — a little. But you won't be ashamed of me; I 'll keep up."

He bent his head and spoke very low in her ear: "It has just struck me — this mafoo of ours does n't look right. In those two hours after I dropped the bag they could have framed up anything on us. God, think of it! A man who knows this town as I do. And responsible for a woman's life. I was insane!"

"No," she whispered; "you were n't insane." Her hand tightened around his fingers.

"The Manilla Kid was at that next table. He must have gone out very soon after I dropped the bag, for there certainly was another party there later. And the Kid 's too coarse even for Tex Connor. Tex turned him off only last night — beat him up, too. At the Alcazar, it was. Watch, now. That other

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carriage is behind us. Will you hold yourself ready to do everything I tell you?"

"Everything," she replied.

"Well, then—" They had passed the race-track and were approaching the business section. He stood up, holding on to the back of the forward seat, touched the mafoo, and pointed to the right, down a side street.

The mafoo hesitated, glanced over his shoulder, then obeyed.

Edith caught the arm of her escort. Under the wide, curving straw hat, and above the blue Chinese gaberdine, she had glimpsed the profile of a Caucasian.

"He 's white," she whispered.

The reporter nodded. "You never saw shoulders like that on a Chinaman. Those were army shoulders once."

The other carriage swung around the corner, half a block behind. They turned other corners, and rolled swiftly through darker, narrower streets. From the changing character of buildings and shops, they were apparently nearing the native city. The reporter was on his feet at every turn, talking in crisp Pidgin English to the mafoo. Once the masquerader turned, and Edith saw the shine of sweat on his cheek and chin. And steadily the other carriage followed.

Suddenly the reporter reached back and seized the bag of gold. Again he spoke to the mafoo. They rounded a corner. The reporter, holding hard and swaying on his feet, raised the bag in his right hand,

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measured his distance, and swung it against the side of the mafoo's head, just under the brim of the big hat.

The man made no sound; merely slid off the seat and tipped endwise over the footboard, striking the pony's rump. His body must have blocked the wheels, for the carriage stopped abruptly.

"Jump!" said the reporter.

Edith leaped out. He followed, gripped her arm, and led her on a run into a placid little Chinese shop. She had only time to be conscious that a group of yellow men were gazing mildly at her over their long tobacco-pipes before she found herself running up a flight of stairs — narrow dark stairs with creaking boards. They hurried around a narrow hall and up a second flight. She had to wait while he raised a scuttle, then followed him out on a flat roof. He closed the scuttle swiftly but silently.

"Step lightly," he said. On tiptoe they crossed from roof to roof, climbing over low walls.

"I 'm afraid I hit that fellow too hard," he said, as he helped her over one of the walls. "But I could n't have him telling where we went. And those Chinamen 'll never tell anything that spells trouble. You can trust John."

One house was a story higher. He lifted her in his arms. She caught the edge of the roof, and he gripped her ankles and swung her over as easily as if she had been a little girl.

It was this taller house that they entered, passing

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She caught the edge of the roof, and he gripped her ankles and swung her over.

down two flights to what must have been the second floor. "Stand here," he whispered. "I — I am known here." And she waited in the pitch-dark

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stuffy hall while he opened a door and disappeared. She heard low voices. In a moment he was back. She had a glimpse of him while the door was open, then lost him in the dark, and put out her hands and felt for him.

He slipped his arm about her shoulders and guided her to another stairway. There was something hard and metallic in his hand; it pressed against her shoulder.

There was a dim light in the lower hall, a rush wick floating in a cruse of oil. He put the metallic object into his coat pocket, then held up a man's raincoat for her.

"Get into this," he said. "You're too white."

The rain-coat enveloped her. She had to hold it up to keep from tripping over it; and the sleeves fell to her knuckles.

He nodded approvingly. "That's better," he said.

They went through a long passage, and emerged on the creek that is the north boundary of Frenchtown.

"Now," he said, "if you're up to it, we'll hike right along. We're all clear, so far."

They crossed a bridge and went through to the moat of the Native City; then for half a mile followed the long curve of the wall. Finally they came out on the French Bund, where there were lights and a slow-moving street crowd of Chinese and French, and beyond, the open space of the river, and the red and green lights of the ships, and the clustering, matting-covered sampans at the water's edge.

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Straight to one of the larger of the sampans he led her. It had a sail of matting, and was moored by a single line. He handed her in, tossed the boatman a handful of Mexican dollars, cast off the line, and leaped in with it. The boatman shouted and gesticulated as the clumsy craft drifted out in the tidal current. From under the cabin of matting peered the moon-faces of a native woman and a pack of children. Nearer at hand a half-naked baby lay asleep, coiled in a large earthenware crock that kept it clear of the water in the bottom of the boat.

The boatman continued his protest with growing excitement. He caught the rail of another sampan, that was moored to the shore fleet. The reporter uttered a few emphatic sentences in the native tongue, then turned toward Edith, who had seated herself at the stern, and tossed the bag of gold down beside her. It fell with that same solid thud and chink.

He had done it again. Again their eyes met. Faces appeared in the neighboring sampans — inscrutable slanting eyes that peered through the faint light; loose yellow lips that chattered in singsong.

The reporter was again talking in Chinese, talking with a good deal of emphasis. The argument was extended until a curious little crowd gathered on the quay. Edith tried to make herself as small as possible. She took off her hat, and turned up the collar of the rain-coat. Finally two other boatmen climbed over into the sampan — stalwart fellows, stripped to the waist, their yellow skin glistening in the electric

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light from the shore. The moon-faced ones were bundled over on to the shore fleet. The white man himself passed over the earthenware crock with the bare little infant still curled within it in slumber.

The two new-comers went forward and got out the sweeps. The owner crawled around behind his passengers and took the tiller. The little craft drifted out clear of its fellows and swung around to the north.

The sweeps moved lazily to and fro. An occasional light breeze came over the water, rippling it just enough to shiver the clear reflections of the lights into a thousand glittering, wavering fragments, and filled the ribbed sail of matting until it creaked lazily on the mast. And the half-naked men at the sweeps sang a jerky, rhythmical chantey as they worked.

They slid past the two old opium hulks, out there in mid-channel, with their shingled gable roofs. They passed a Chinese torpedo-boat, a Japanese cruiser, a tramp from Norway. He pointed out the sights of the Bund, where the lights flickered softly through the trees and the faint sounds of the evening traffic came out to them. He had drawn her tired little head down on his shoulder, and was holding it there.

"I want to hear the duet," she said softly. "Don't you suppose you could remember the words?"

He shook his head. "I don't want to," he said, and held her tight against him. "They are parting, you know."

"Yes," she mused dreamily—"I know."

"She clings to him. He tells her to be brave. Says,

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'Maskee, we will wait.' She does n't understand. He sings, 'Maskee Means Never Mind'— never mind the heartache, never mind the —"

His voice broke; she felt him shiver. Then he bent down and drew her face up to his and kissed her lips. Her hand stole up to the lapel of his coat, slipped around his neck. Again he pressed his lips to hers. No man had ever kissed her like that.

There was a stir and a movement directly behind them, within the sampan, that neither of them heard or saw.

Coughing and pounding along from the Bund, the steam tender of the German Mail came up from behind and passed them, sending a series of swells that gently rocked their craft. Neither knew it.

"I 'm not going to ask if you love me," he whispered.

She buried her face against his coat.

"No," he went on, close to her ear, "I don't seem to care. It won't matter after this hour. But it is my big hour." His voice broke again; and he whispered unevenly, "My big hour. I 've loved you from the minute I saw you. I could n't stand it. I could n't stand it. I 'd live for you — and I 'd die for you. I 'm dreaming. It has all been a dream."

He could just hear her murmur, "Then I 'm dreaming, too." Her head fell back on his arm. She was looking out under drooping lids at the wide, silent river.

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"I 'm bewildered," she said, a little later, sitting erect and pressing her hands to her eyes. "I don't want to go to that ship. I want to stay here. Oh, you don't know how strange this is! I 'm different. I 'm all changed. Nothing that I thought seems to be so."

He took her in his arms again.

"Yes," she went on, breathless; "it 's all changed, all new. Suppose I don't go. I 'll take you away from this dreadful city. We 'll go to Yokohama, you and I. And we 'll ride in rickshaws to Mississippi Bay!"

She laughed, softly and excitedly, and nestled closer within the grip of his arm. It was amazing, this sudden discovery that back of her restlessness and her resentments surged daring thoughts and great wild forces.

"If you only knew what you 've done — what this means! It 's queer. It bewilders —"

"What 's that!" he muttered shortly, and sat up rigid. *"What 's that!"*

He looked behind him. The helmsman was not there. The sweeps were still. There was silence forward — broken only by the pad of naked feet in the dark of the matting cabin. There was silence again, then a rustling.

He glanced swiftly around. They had left the lights of Shanghai around a bend; the "Paris of the East" was now only a yellow glow in the sky. On either shore were the low fields of the open country-

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side. A mile or so ahead were the lights and the dim outline of a big liner.

Again they caught that rustling in the cabin.

"This means trouble," said he. He had taken his arm from about her and was fumbling for something in his coat pocket. "It may be the end of us," he added, more calmly and with some bitterness. "I 've failed you again, it seems."

"No, no," said she; "you have n't — you have n't!"

"That 's about the size of it. But I 'll tell you this" — he was leaning forward, his eyes fixed on the black semicircle under the arch of matting. "If I get you through all right, just remember that one man has loved you with all —"

She stopped the words with her own soft mouth. She was sobbing a little, and the tears were running unheeded down her face.

For an instant he pressed her slim body against his own; then tore her arms away and swung her partly behind him.

"Is the bag there?" he asked, never shifting his eyes from the cabin.

She was searching. "No — I can't find it."

"That devil got it all right. Look out! Lie down behind me!"

There was a swift rush from that black archway. His automatic pistol was up on the instant, spitting bullets in a stream. One man dropped. One leaped back. The third came staggering toward them, nearly

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fell over the reporter, and caught at the girl's arm to save himself from going over the side. He had a knife in his hand. The white man had to hit him over

There was a swift rush from that black archway. His automatic pistol was up on the instant, spitting bullets in a stream.

the head and then kick him clear of the rail. He dropped, with a quiet little splash, and disappeared.

The reporter stood over the cabin, and called in Chinese. Slowly the last native crawled out, empty-

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handed. The reporter sent him back. This time he brought the bag of gold. The reporter tossed it back on the seat by the girl. "It seems to be all right," he said.

She examined it, and replied: "Yes, I think it 's all here."

The yellow man crouched near the side of the sampan, visibly shivering with fright. The reporter looked at him thoughtfully, with lowered weapon.

"There 's a Chinese crew on that ship," he mused, "and we don't want stories told. After all, I don't know that one more makes so much difference."

Accordingly, he shot this last one through the head, and rolled his body over the side.

The bugler of the German liner had blown his last note of warning. The final calls of "All ashore!" had resounded from deck to deck. The steam tender whistled repeatedly as it swung off; passengers crowded the rail, waving handkerchiefs and shouting farewell messages.

A little later, when the tender was no more than a dark spot with twinkling lights above it at the end of a long lane of white foam, a sampan slid up unobserved to the companion ladder.

A girl stood at the side. A white man held the little boat close to the grating.

"Quick," he said. "Jump!"

"What if I should n't —" she breathed.

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"For God's sake!" said he, in a voice that he could not control very well.

"But wait! What on earth are you going to do? How can you go back?"

"Maskee! Maskee! Get aboard. They 'll be hauling this thing up in a minute."

A moment longer the girl hesitated. Very white she was, in costume and face. She bent her head toward him; but he said nothing, merely devoted his strength to keeping the clumsy craft from swinging off with the tide. Finally she stepped over on to the grating. In one hand she carried a green parasol, in the other a bag of gold that was not quite dry on one side.

She paused a moment to draw down her veil, casually setting down the bag on the grating as she did so. Then she went on up the ladder, rather slowly.

She was vaguely conscious that a German quartermaster was shouting down the ladder. On the promenade-deck the inevitable little German band was tooting its farewell to the port of Shanghai. There was a great stir and movement of gaily dressed passengers, a general air of irresponsible security.

She did not hear his voice until he was directly behind her, nearly at the top of the ladder.

He was quite out of breath. "Quick," he said, "they must n't see me! But I want you to have this." And he thrust the familiar wad of copy paper into her hands, just a mass of loose sheets that, with the bag

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of gold and the parasol and her wrist-bag to manage, she could hardly keep from blowing away.

"It 's my whole story," he went on rapidly. "It 's all there. What was n't there I wrote on it to-night — at the restaurant. My whole story."

He turned and ran down the long ladder, two steps at a time. At some point in their troubles he must have lost his hat, for he was bareheaded now; but the bicycle clips still confined the bottoms of those shapeless trousers.

Wearily, feeling very, very old, she went on to the deck, where no one appeared to notice her particularly, and then found her cabin below.

Her plan was to go directly to bed; but she could n't. Instead, she straightened out the heap of papers with a gentle hand and crowded them into her shopping-bag, and went back to the promenade-deck. She wondered, as she mounted the stairs, what it was that he had written — that spidery Chinese character.

There was some excitement out here, it seemed. The brightly clad passengers had crowded to the rail. An unmistakably German voice, somewhere aft, was booming out orders. But the passengers were hushed.

She edged in just behind a party of women. One of these proved to be a kindly old lady with white hair and with a sort of horror on her face.

"What is it?" asked Edith. "What has happened?" Her voice sounded small and strange.

It was a moment before the old lady could find her

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own voice; then she replied, "Oh, my dear! It is dreadful. A man is drowned."

It was half an hour later that she encountered Mr. Carpenter. She was walking back and forth, a solitary little figure in white, among the shadows at the rear of the promenade-deck. He came slowly along, his head bowed, moodily smoking a cigar.

He asked no questions — merely gave her a long look of relief, and stood by her at the rail, watching the dim, low shores. It did not occur to her to ask why he was here. It was a long time before she could frame the question that was in her mind. She managed it finally by opening her shopping-bag, taking out a few of the loose sheets, and holding them up in the light of one of the electric deck lamps.

"What does that Chinese mean?" she asked. Her voice was natural enough; but, oh, how *old* she felt!

He took the papers in his hand and studied them closely. It was good of him to take her having them so for granted, for he knew all about them.

He looked up, and thoughtfully flicked the ash off his cigar. "That," he said, "is an old Chinese character meaning —"

He stopped short, and looked down at his cigar.

"He said it was his whole story," she broke out impulsively. "I think he wanted me to know."

"Well, then," Carpenter went on, "it is the old ideograph representing, literally, two women under a roof. And it means trouble. It is the Chinese for

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our word 'trouble' . . . The poor boy had a Chinese wife and several children."

Later, after he had made her walk for a while, he said, in a refreshingly matter-of-fact tone:

"The purser is still up. This would be his busy night. I really think you'd better turn your gold over to him and take a receipt."

Miss Austin, her green veil covering a sad white face, obeyed.

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IX

THE SHIP TO SINGAPORE

"I SHALL never marry," said Miss Austin. And she said it rather sadly.

Henry Carpenter, in the next steamer chair, continued to gaze soberly out over the calm surface of the China Sea.

"Then," he replied, a few moments later, "I shall leave the ship at Hongkong."

"Oh!" the soft exclamation escaped the girl. "But that will be to-morrow!"

He nodded. "To-morrow. I had to come this far. I had to ask the question. You have been honest with me. And you know your own mind."

The girl bit her lip. If there was one thing above all others in the world that she did not know, it was her own mind. Unexpected complexities lay in that quarter.

"I like you — bushels," she murmured.

He nodded again. "I know you do. But it would have to be more than that."

Tears came to her eyes. Which was absurd enough. She turned her head and looked aft past the long rows of drowsy, white-clad persons in steamer chairs to where the second cabin deck house was rising and

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falling with the gentle swell. She had come to be fond of this man. He was steady. You could count on him. . . . Why could n't she bring herself to feel that wonderful impulse toward him that people call love? Everything would be so simple then. He was considerate, gentle, intelligent; he would make a wonderful companion. But there was no magic between them — not now, at least. For a fluttering moment the question rose in her confused mind — "Is marriage magic, after all? Or is it, at its best, a steady companionship? Could magic last?" . . . She had treated this man outrageously since the ship left Shanghai. She had been moody, capricious, even sulky — how really sulky, disturbed, downright bewildered, he would never know.

"I 've changed," she said, in a voice that was steady enough. "I 'm different."

When he replied to this, it was merely to say —

"We all change."

"I don't believe you do," said she, gazing down at her clasped hands.

He smiled a little. He made no reply.

The deck steward brought tea. They sipped for awhile.

She found herself wishing wildly that this man would be more determined. Even vehemence from him would be a relief. Why did n't he *make* her marry him! He would be what the observant world would regard as an ideal husband for such as she. But there was a touch of bitterness in this thought.

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She became conscious that he was looking at her with a gentle gravity, and made an effort to bring her racing mind under control.

"I don't want you to leave the ship at Hongkong," she said, under her breath.

"I 'm sorry," said he. "I 'd like to be your friend. But I 've gone too far. I could n't go on giving you a little of my life. I must give you everything now — or nothing."

It was rather wonderful that he should want her as much as that. It seemed to her that she did n't deserve it. And he put it so simply, with such reserve.

"You see," he went on, almost apologetically, "I may appear steady enough —"

"You do," she murmured.

"— but an experience like this really tears one up dreadfully."

She rested a light hand on his arm. "I know. I could n't have understood a week ago. But now . . ."

"I would go on to Singapore," he continued —"I would try to be your friend, just your friend — if I could trust myself, if I thought I could keep my balance. But it would n't do for me to make a failure of it."

"I don't know what to say," she broke out. "I seem to have lost the power to think. When it comes right down to the thought that you are actually going, and I 'm not to see you any more or have you to depend on — well, I just don't want you to go! I seem

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to need you. Maybe I do love you. How can I say! I don't know what love is — what it ought to be. . . . Oh, why do these questions have to come up! Why do we have to be torn and disturbed this way! I used to enjoy everything — now I don't enjoy anything. And I did n't want this. I only wanted to be let alone."

"That," he observed, with a slow shake of his head, "is probably the one thing none of us can ever hope for."

"To be let alone?"

"We are all a part of the tangle of life."

"It *is* a tangle!" she breathed.

"Listen!" she said, a little later. "I 'm not going to let you go at Hongkong. If you 'll only come on as far as Singapore, I 'll promise to make up my mind. There — there 's nothing to prevent it." She sighed. "Nothing — nothing else."

Over his lean face flitted an odd, momentary smile. It was what would perhaps be called a wry smile. What a child she was, after all! And what on earth were you to do with her? There was n't anywhere in her adorable little head a glimmer of light as to what it must mean to a responsible business man to drop everything and disappear for a fortnight.

He shook his head. "No, Edith, I don't see how that would make the decision any easier. No — I will drop off at Hongkong."

"But," she protested, "that 's — we 're almost there now — why, to-morrow you will be gone!"

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He inclined his head. Edith bit her lip again.

Then two expatriates from Yokohama stopped before them and talked with some enthusiasm of the sights of Canton. It was nearly an hour later before Edith could slip away to her cabin — ostensibly to dress for dinner, but really to sit on her berth, cuddle Wing in her lap, and gaze moodily out the open port.

She had slipped out of her dress and into her kimono — the kimono that had been admired by Rhoda Eavesby, the little missionary of Shansi who had loved beautiful things. Edith looked soberly down at it, and herself fingered the Kioto embroidery as the devoted missionary had fingered it. Tears came to her eyes.

Outside the port the oily tropical ocean slid endlessly by. Now and then, as the ship rolled gently down and the horizon moved deliberately upward, she could see the little black flying fish skimming over the surface.

No, she did not want Henry Carpenter to leave the ship at Hongkong. Until now she had never been for long far from friends or, at least, relatives. This man was the last tie that bound her to the world of reality, and now he was permitting her to plunge on into a new, bewildering life — all alone.

The alternative was to surrender her life to his in marriage. The tears came again. She held Wing so tightly that he wriggled a protest. It was n't fair of Henry Carpenter to put the choice to her in that way.

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Why, it was exactly what Bob Carver had done — the thing she had run away from! Come to think of it, it was what men always do!

She thought again of Rhoda Eavesby. Rhoda had forsworn marriage to devote her life to serving her less fortunate fellows. There was something to be said for that choice. It was hard; it was rough; you had to surrender all that is pleasant and easy in life; but it did surely bring a fine sense of independence.

Thinking of this, Edith found herself caught up in quite a little glow of enthusiasm. She almost decided to become a missionary. That the ship was bearing her steadily and swiftly away from Rhoda and her kind, that she herself lacked almost utterly the equipment in general education and special training, appeared, for the moment, merely rather vague and unimportant details.

But the vague and unimportant details grew clearer as the moments passed. Soon they were asserting themselves with considerable force. The single small detail that Rhoda could read, write and speak Chinese gradually magnified itself in her mind. Why, that one little accomplishment meant years upon years of study!

Once or twice before in her young life, when contemplating revolt from the shackles of family life, Edith had considered breaking out into the great rough world and "doing something." And now, as on those former occasions, it was the consciousness of her own utter lack of solid equipment that baffled her.

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You had to be trained for years before you could do *anything*.

Edith drew no conclusions from this fact. She did not dwell upon the plight of the American girl in general — trained only to be charming at the expense of somebody else. She only felt uncomfortable, and confused, and more than a thought resentful.

But on this occasion there was a new factor in the situation, a factor of which she was quite conscious. Heretofore, in dwelling on these problems, firm in the untried courage of youth, it had not so much as occurred to her to doubt her own triumphant progress. But now . . . something had happened. Vivid pictures rose before her mind's eye. She saw herself again at the shop on the Nanking Road, surrendering her camel, and receiving in exchange the bag of gold. She saw herself in a carriage, with a young man who wore bicycle clips and a derby hat. She lived through that odd little scene at the restaurant on Bubbling Well Road, where the young man had read his verses to her with a flush on his cheek and a light in his eye. The rest of it came rushing up then to the surface of her thoughts — the ride in the sampan; that dream-like scene of death; wild kisses on her lips, on her own young lips. . . .

She fought these memories back. They bewildered her. But she could not altogether conquer the new misgivings that were these days eating at the foundation of all that had been solid in her habitual attitude toward herself.

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Henry Carpenter was really solid. She had clung to him; but he was leaving her now.

Her Uncle and Aunt, even, were solid. They seemed to have arrived, at least, at a sort of working understanding with life. You did n't feel, in thinking of them, that they were upset and bewildered about it. For a moment, at this stage, she even lost confidence in her judgment in running away from them.

Her ticket on this ship read to Naples. That was nearly a month away — a month of tropical seas and palm-shaded ports — and nothing to do but rest in steamer chairs and think about yourself. It had not occurred to her before to fear this journey — not until now that Henry Carpenter had definitely decided to leave her. She thought that it would be better if she had something to do right away. She was afraid of inactivity, and languor, and of what she might think and feel.

With a sudden determination, she put Wing aside, got up, and set about dressing for dinner. If the time had at last come when she could not trust herself with her own thoughts, very well — she would seek refuge in activity. The choice was hers, right now, to marry; and to marry, as the phrase runs, "well." But she would not marry in weakness. She would not marry for sanctuary. That many, many girls, behind a masking pretence of eternal love, do precisely this, she knew very well. And she thought it dreadful.

Above all, she would not marry because the man —

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this one man she had thought a real friend — offered her the flat choice, in the spirit of what seemed to her, at the moment, almost a threat. No, she would meet him squarely. She would confront him, steady of eye, firm of speech, mistress of herself. In the morning the ship would dock at Hongkong; they would go ashore — very likely he would ask her to a parting luncheon — but he would stand firm, and so would she.

When Miss Austin entered the ship's dining room more than an hour later, a hundred pairs of eyes followed her along the aisle to her seat at the Captain's table. For her head was high. There was color in her cheek. She wore a gown of dull blue chiffon cloth made over white silk, embroidered heavily in gold at the bottom of the narrow skirt and with a touch of gold at the shoulders. On her pretty feet were gold satin slippers and silk stockings to match. Bound about her fluffy hair was a broad gold band. And she carried, carelessly on her arm, a wonderful old mandarin coat, about which, evidently, the costume had been built. It was of a dull, gray-blue silk, this coat, embroidered heavily in self-tones with touches of pink and white, and with great daring swirls of gold over-embroidery. The lining was white silk.

She passed Henry Carpenter, who smiled in friendly but grave fashion, with a jerky little bow that had in it more evidence of pride than she dreamed.

After dinner they had coffee on deck, he and she. It was harder to be natural than she had foreseen, he was so extremely sober. But natural she was de-

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termined to appear; and accordingly she chatted about nothing at all with an ease bordering on recklessness. They talked and walked with others. It was well on in the evening before they found themselves standing, apart from the smoking, bridge-playing ship's company, at the forward end of the promenade deck. Edith leaned on the rail and watched the creamy shine of the foam that rolled away from the bow in rhythmical rushes.

After a time he nodded toward the forecastle.

"Would you care to go out there?" he asked.

She hesitated, and glanced inquiringly at him. Her pride, that had supported her so splendidly during and after dinner, was weaker now. Like all her other emotions, during this queer phase of her life, when she was no longer a girl and yet not quite a woman, it had risen upon her only to pass by, like a wave.

She wondered why he asked her to do this. The forecastle was a secluded spot — a lover's nook, indeed. But she would not refuse.

He was glancing down at her costume, rather uncertainly. "But you are not exactly dressed for climbing around," said he.

"Nonsense," said she. And started for the ladder so promptly that he had to step quickly to be at her elbow in time to lend a hand.

They descended, passed the closed hatch that was covered with sprawling, half-clad steerage passengers, climbed the forecastle ladder, and made their way forward around donkey engines and over heaps of

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chains. He found a seat for her against a coil of clean yellow rope, where she could lean back and watch the dim, flat sea and the sky that blazed with millions of stars.

"Where is the Southern Cross?" she asked.

He pointed it out. But he had next to nothing to say. Gradually it became clear to her that he had not brought her here for the purpose of talking to her. She puzzled much. Probably he merely wished to construct a final memory of a pleasant hour with her. Whatever was in his thoughts, his long silences nettled her. She was sure he had not weakened.

She was wondering again about marriage. An imp of the imagination suggested, now and again, that she was asking too much of life — that an occasional magical hour may come or not, but marriage is a fact that a girl at the dawn of womanhood may not evade. Possibly the very definiteness of it, the irrevocability of it, might prove to be a relief. Certainly there were difficulties in the way of making your own decisions, choosing your own road.

It was very still up here. There was none of the throbbing and roar of the engines; only a faint pulse. Edith looked back, and discovered that they were quite hidden from the promenade deck; she could see only the bridge and wheel-house, a few ventilators, the tops of the two big funnels, and the masts and rigging. At the moment it seemed a friendly, human thing, this great dim ship.

But her friend was with her now, seated by her side,

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close, thoughtfully smoking a Manilla cigar. Another evening, and he would not be here. She would be alone — facing that long voyage, facing life itself, disturbed by new doubts, undermined by loneliness, uncertain of herself.

And then she knew that her heart was sinking. She fought this depression; but knew, as she fought it, that it was going to be too strong for her. She leaned forward, and a little away from him, gazing out into the illimitable night.

"He told me about you," she said, as if she were thinking aloud. "You helped him with his opera."

He caught the drift of her thoughts. He was not clumsy, thank Heaven! "It did n't amount to much, Edith. There really was n't anything one could do."

She was silent again. A little later she said, musing —

"What is love?"

He smoked on very soberly.

"I always thought it was simple."

"It is n't," said he.

"No," she agreed, "it is n't. It 's terribly complicated. You think you know exactly what you 're going to do next — and you don't at all."

He made no reply at all to this. But, curiously, she felt perception and sympathy in his silence.

She threw out her hands in a nervous gesture. "I can't seem to straighten it out at all. Why — why,

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I actually don't know his name! He sent in his card once or twice; but that was before — it did n't mean anything to me then. And yet . . ."

The humorless egotism of youth is not to be taken lightly. And it is not to be opposed. Carpenter, now that she was actually on the verge of confidences, tried a diversion. But first he let a decent interval of silence elapse.

"Hongkong harbor is beautiful," he said. "You will love it — the green hills and the white buildings among the trees. But I want you to give me just a thought at Penang."

She flashed a frankly puzzled glance at him.

"You 'll have nearly a day at Penang — it 's thirty-six hours the other side of Singapore, in the Straits. Of all the places I know in the East, I think Penang suits me best. I don't know why. Probably there are more beautiful spots — I can't say. I love Penang. You 'll have time to take a carriage there — they call them gharries, you know — and drive out to the Botanical Gardens. Probably you will fall in with some party from the ship. That 's how it usually works out. And there is a stone hotel on the beach, right up against the sea wall, that 's a good place to have tea."

He paused here, not wishing to carry it too far.

"I shall think of you," she said. Then — "I think I shall tell you. I 've got to tell somebody. I never did such a thing before in my life."

So she was not to be diverted!

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Very soberly he listened — very soberly indeed — lighting another cigar; and still another. For the man to whom it is given to look freely into the heart of a girl carries a burden.

When the long recital was over — and she told the whole story of that wild night at Shanghai — he rose and leaned against the rail.

She looked up, wet-eyed, self-absorbed, utterly beautiful.

"I did n't know I could tell it, but — please understand!"

"I think I understand, Edith," he replied, more gently than she had yet heard him speak. "I think we had better go back now. It is pretty late."

He let her get up alone. And in stepping over the ropes and chairs and descending the ladder, he did not so much as touch her arm. She was deep in the mysteries of life, and failed to observe the fact.

He gave her a steady smile when they said good-night. He had to take her hand then, for she thrust it out. After which he mounted to the deserted boat deck, beneath which lay no hot and irritable sleepers, and tramped around and around, a long time, from late to early; until his Chinese silver cigar case was empty.

The little luncheon took place that next day at Hongkong. In a coolish hotel on a hill.

Then he returned with her to the ship; and chatted until she went below to dress. He said good-by at the gangway, while the launch waited below, and was

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still standing there when she last looked back from the door.

He was taking it coolly enough — merely wishing her a pleasant voyage. There was nothing in his manner to suggest the very responsible business man who had slipped out for ten minutes after ordering luncheon and sent sixty-two gold dollars' worth of cablegrams. Nothing whatever. She did not even know of the cablegrams. She wondered a little, as she descended the stairs. And she spoke rather sharply to Wing.

She dressed quickly, and returned to the deck. The ship was just under weigh. The launch had gone — she could see it now, half way to the wharf. But she could not make him out in the handkerchief-waving group at the stern. Probably he had settled himself comfortably forward where he could catch what air was stirring and smoke in peace. The thought nettled her.

For a little while she covertly studied the new comers on the ship. They were mostly arguing with the German deck stewards regarding choice places for their chairs.

But the spectacle depressed her. She suddenly discovered that the older inhabitants (by a few days) of the ship were long-time friends, and that these interlopers were hostile and unwelcome. She climbed the ladder-like stairway to the boat deck, where were others, like herself, indignantly avoiding the invasion of Huns and Vandals below. She walked slowly past

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these, farther aft, by the funnels and the line of tarpaulin-covered boats.

She rounded the corner of the wireless office, and came upon the open space behind it. A sailor-person was chalking out a shuffle-board pattern on the deck. There was no one else back here.

Or was there? Yes — glancing around the other corner she saw the end of a steamer chair and a pair of feet — a man's feet, in fresh-white canvas shoes. Moving a step farther, she saw that the feet were attached to a pair of long legs. She took another step.

Then, for one brief instant, her breath left her. She stood motionless and speechless, and a little pale.

Slowly the color returned to her cheeks, and deepened. Her eyes lighted with relief that ran on into something not unlike sheer happiness. For the canvas shoes and the long legs, encased in fresh-white, neatly pressed duck, were the peculiar and personal property of one Henry Carpenter. He had a book in his lap. He wore a white coat of military cut, with high collar that was buttoned in front with lumps of silver bearing the stamp of Siamese legal tender. And a white cotton hat was on his head.

She had never seen anything quite so comfortable, quite so solid — never anything that looked so *good* — as this sight.

It seemed to her that she must control herself. It simply would not do to become all excited this way. What would he think? And what on earth was she

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to think herself! She was caught in the wild impulse to talk eagerly about every impersonal subject on earth, anything that would cover her confusion. But what she really did was to stand quite motionless and say nothing at all.

Slowly he became aware of her presence.

Then he rose.

"Surprised?" he asked, smiling.

"Well — naturally!" said she.

"I know. I did n't mean to stage manage it like this." His face sobered. "I 'll spare you the explanations, Edith. It 's only that on thinking it over, I realized that I had refused to be your friend. That would n't do, of course. So I 'm going on to Singapore. And the easiest way to do it seemed to be to quit talking and just go. So, if you like, we 'll consider the necessary little scene as having occurred. . . . Want to sit here with me? or would you rather walk by yourself?"

"I think," said she, "that I 'll — sit down."

Her thoughts were still racing. She wondered if she would ever again be able to bring them under control. She was aware that he was speaking — pausing — speaking. Now she was flushing again. This was dreadful. She must do something — at least say something.

He paused again. The pause ran on into a silence. No subject that her ungoverned thoughts touched on seemed germane.

Finally, in despair, she looked straight at him —

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color high, eyes dancing, obviously a very young, very beautiful, very confused person.

"Listen!" she said, breathlessly. "I meant to ask you — what on earth *is* cutch, anyway?"

It was three days later that a message — flying by wireless to Singapore and by cable through Hongkong, Shanghai, and Nagasaki — got itself written down on a square of paper and delivered by the hand of a Japanese carrier to Mrs. Wilberly, in the Grand Hotel at Yokohama.

It was Mrs. Wilberly who answered the knock at the door; for Mr. Wilberly, his fat person incased in a bright blue kimono, was standing over his steamer-trunk, expressing certain rather explosive feelings with some vehemence. He had just discovered that all his ship clothing, excepting one pair of flannel trousers, had been packed in the big trunk, and that the big trunk had already been carried out to the ship and, doubtless, stored deep in the hold.

And then, anyway, she would not have let him answer the knock, because his sputterings had begun before this last painful discovery. She had said, as she so often did, that *his* mistake had lain in his failure to take the very next ship out of Shanghai after Edith Austin, and *catch* her.

And he had said that you could n't spot a German Mail ship a three-day handicap and catch up with her this side of Naples, Italy. Not unless you had a faster boat. Which you did n't have. That, in short,

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as a practical business-man, he knew the thing could n't be done. And that she knew it, too.

"Well, what is it?" said he now, as she tore open the envelope.

She did not reply. Instead, she sank down on the nearest chair and looked at him with a blank face.

"Well?" said he. "Well? Well?"

Mrs. Wilberly swallowed. "Frank," she got out, "Edith marries Henry Carpenter to-morrow at Singapore!"

Mr. Wilberly sat right down on the sharp side of the steamer-trunk. For a moment his face worked.

"Thank God!" he said.

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